THE FALL OF DANIEL LIBESKIND

RUTH FRANKLIN

WHY THE MUSLIM WORLD TUNED OUT THE INAUGURATION

HUSAIN HAQQANI

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THE LAST CASUALTY

LAWRENCE F. KAPLAN ON THE DEATH OF LIBERALISM IN IRAQ

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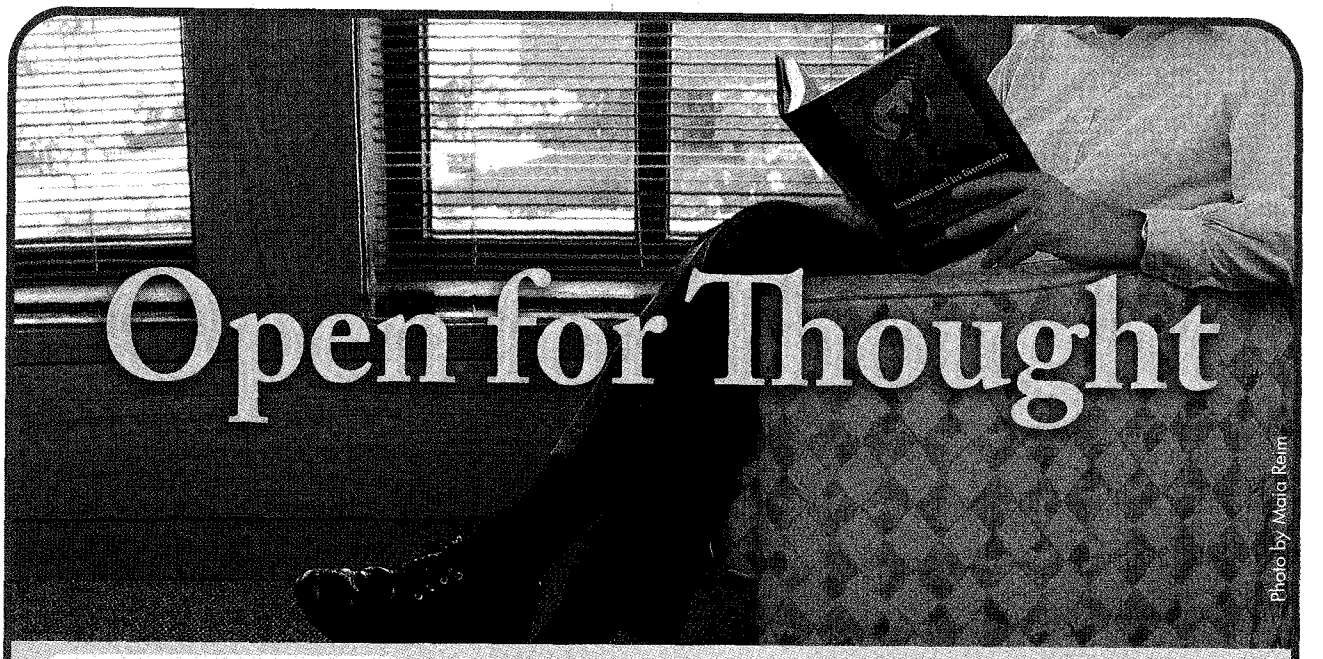

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THE NEW REPUBLIC
A JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND THE ARTS

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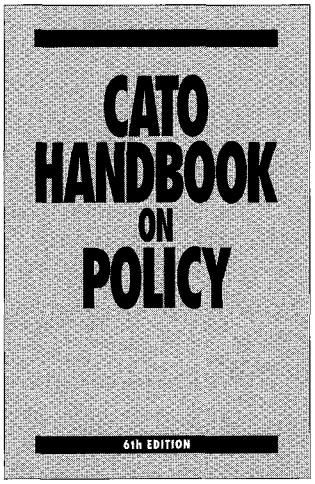

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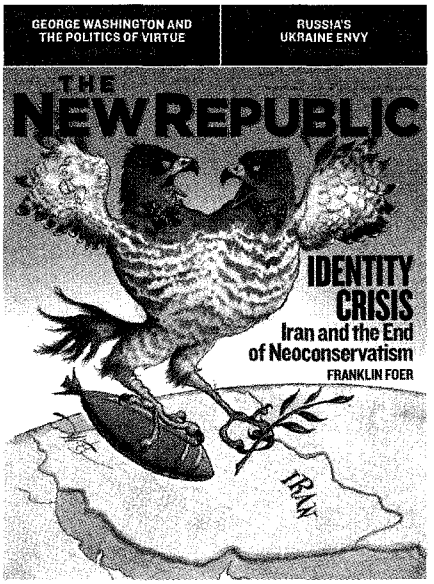
EURO TRASHED

THERE IS ONE SUBJECT THAT I WISH John B. Judis had dealt with in greater depth ("Unreconciled," December 20, 2004). He quotes Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodriguez Zapatero telling *Der Spiegel* that "Europe must believe that, in 20 years, it can become the most important world power," but Judis makes this sound like a reaction to George W. Bush's reelection. Having watched the European Union take shape while working in Europe over the last decade, this "world power" attitude was as present in Europe during the early '90s as Judis says it is today. Why has this thinking gained root? It is more about the American cultural influence in Europe and less about Bush; more about McDonald's than the Middle East; more about creating a world currency than building relations. I agree with former American Ambassador to Germany John Kornblum that we must begin to repair the rift. But let's not come to the table with rose-colored glasses.

DAVID BRUGH
Centerville, Ohio

HARD LINE

PETER BEINART'S ATTACK ON DEMocrats and liberals who oppose Bush's radical militarism is both deeply insulting and fundamentally wrong ("A Fighting Faith," December 13, 2004). From his point of view, Democrats are divided into "hards" and "softs"—hards, of course, being good, and softs bad. These contemptuous terms do nothing to contribute to a serious discussion of liberalism, the Democratic Party, or U.S. national security needs; foreign policy is not a Viagra commercial. The Bush reliance on military might may be "hard," but tragically it is also dangerous, ineffective, and wrong. If Beinart really believes that totalitarian Islam is "an external enemy more grave, and more illiberal, than George W. Bush," he would do well to side with the liberal Democrats



he denounces. It is precisely Bush's recklessness that is helping to recruit new adherents to fundamentalist Islam. Liberal Democrats are not—and were never—reluctant to fight the real perpetrators of terrorism. After September 11, Democrats voted nearly unanimously to confront Al Qaeda and the Taliban with devastating force, a battle the administration abandoned in order to go after Saddam Hussein—the same man who is now certified by the United States to have had no weapons of mass destruction at the time of the invasion; the same man who, after gassing his own people and invading Kuwait, did business with Dick Cheney and Halliburton.

If John Kerry had voted against the war in Iraq, he would have won the election. He would have been true to his principles, immune from "flip-flopper" charges, and capable of focusing on Bush's failed war in Iraq and his bungling of the war on terrorism. The truth is that Democrats and liberals are more consistently anti-totalitarian than Bush, the Republicans, or the neoconservatives, who actually embrace dictators as long as they are *their* dictators.

THE NEW REPUBLIC (ISSN 0028-6583), Vol. 232, Number 4, Issue 4,699, February 7, 2005. (Printed in the United States on January 27, 2005.) Published weekly (except for combined issues dated March 28 & April 4, May 2 & 9, June 6 & 13, July 11 & 18, August 22 & 29, November 28 & December 5, and December 26, 2005 through January 9, 2006) at 1331 H Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20005. Telephone (202) 508-4444. For advertising inquiries, please contact Grant Loomis at (202) 508-4444 or our NY sales office at (212) 465-9447. Yearly subscriptions, $79.97, foreign, $119.97 (U.S. funds); Canada, $99.97 (U.S. funds). Back issues, $6.00 domestic and $10.00 foreign/Canada (includes postage & handling). © 2005 by The New Republic, LLC. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, D.C., and additional mailing offices. Rights and permissions: fax (202) 628-9383. Indexed in Readers' Guide, Media Review Digest. For hard copy reprints, call (202) 508-4444. Microform, Canadian Periodical Index, and CD-ROM are available through ProQuest, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Telephone (800) 521-0600. Postmaster: Send changes of address to The New Republic, P.O. Box 420235, Palm Coast, FL 32142-0235. Member, Audit Bureau of Circulations. Unsolicited manuscripts can be returned only if accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope (e-mail address: letters@tnr.com). For subscription inquiries or problems call (800) 827-1289 or visit our website at www.thenewrepublic.com.

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Dwight Eisenhower's CIA was largely responsible for the overthrow of the democratically chosen leader of Iran and the installation of the anti-democratic shah. Richard Nixon was president and Henry Kissinger national security adviser when the democratically elected leader of Chile was assassinated with the support of the CIA.

Liberal Democrats have consistently supported military action in the name of preserving democracy and human life abroad or of protecting U.S. interests, but only as the very last resort. It is essential to be strong militarily, but it is even more necessary to recognize war as a failure, as something to be aggressively avoided. The United States can, and must, use its superpower status to find diplomatic solutions to political conflicts, work with our allies, strengthen and support international institutions like the United Nations, set an example for aspiring and emerging democracies, and win hearts and minds. That is not being soft. Diplomatic efforts are not easy, but they obviate the need for our brave military men and women to go, too often ill-equipped, into battle. To be perceived as strong, Democrats do not need to emulate the faux machismo of neocons, most of whom scrupulously avoided any personal contact with the battlefields of war. Quite the opposite. Our only failing has been one of confidence, the confidence to stand up unapologetically for our vision of a twenty-first century in which the United States is the leader for peace. As Bill Clinton recently said, "Strength and wisdom are not opposing values."

JAN SCHAKOWSKY
U.S. Representative
Washington, D.C.

ALTERED STATE

LAWRENCE F. KAPLAN HAS IT WRONG in his intemperate attack on the Department of State and on the professionals of the Foreign Service ("State's Rights," December 2, 2004). He dredges up episodes from 1948, 1966, and 1979; vilifies loyal and courageous public servants; and piles on epithets like "inbred club" and "defiance." Beyond his rhetoric, he fails to recognize the difference between constructive dissent (which we encourage) and insubordination (which we do not). Does Kaplan prefer a Foreign Service of cheerleaders who never offer advice, never ask questions, and never suggest alternative courses of action? All of us who serve the U.S. government and the American people understand the importance of supporting established policy as made by the president. As an administration debates policy, however, we also have the responsibility to point out, through long-established channels in the State Department, the unintended effects or hidden opportunities in a course of action. Anything less is abandoning our professional responsibility to offer the president and his counselors the best possible advice. Kaplan urges Condoleezza Rice to "tame" the Foreign Service and to "crack the whip." She knows better. She knows that, in the Foreign Service, she has the complete support of a unique group of highly qualified, dedicated professionals who have repeatedly shown themselves willing to serve their country in the most difficult and dangerous places, often at great personal cost and sacrifice.

AMBASSADOR JOHN W. LIMBERT
President
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insights A NEW MUSEUM SERIES

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Leon Wieseltier, Literary Editor of *The New Republic*

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Life Lesson

TRB FROM WASHINGTON

HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON is absolutely right. I've waited many years to write that sentence, but, hey, if you live long enough. ... I'm referring to her superb speech earlier this week on the politics and morality of abortion. There were two very simple premises to Clinton's argument: a) the right to legal abortion should remain, and b) abortion is always and everywhere a moral tragedy. It seems to me that if we are to reduce abortions to an absolute minimum (and who, exactly, opposes that objective?), then Clinton's formula is the most practical. Her key sentences: "We can all recognize that abortion in many ways represents a sad, even tragic choice to many, many women. ... The fact is that the best way to reduce the number of abortions is to reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies in the first place."

Echoing her husband's inspired notion that abortion should be "safe, legal, and rare," the senator from New York seemed to give new emphasis to that last word: "rare." Hers is, in that respect, a broadly pro-life position. Not in an absolutist, logically impeccable fashion—which would require abolishing all forms of legal abortion immediately—but in a pragmatic, moral sense. In a free society, the ability of a woman to control what happens to her own body will always and should always be weighed in the balance against the right of an unborn child to life itself. And, if she and the Democrats can move the debate away from the question of abortion's legality toward abortion's immorality, then they stand a chance of winning that debate in the coming years.

For too long, supporters of abortion rights have foolishly and callously trivialized the moral dimensions of the act of ending human life in the womb. They have insisted that no profound moral cost is involved. They remain seemingly impassive in the face of the horrors of partial-birth abortion. They talk in the abstract language of "reproductive rights" and of a "war against women." To acknowledge that human life is valuable from conception to death has been, at times, beyond their capacity. They have seemed blind to the fact that, as Naomi Wolf once alluded in this magazine, mothers and children have souls and that, in every abortion, one soul is destroyed and another wounded. And they seem far too dismissive of the fact that the concerns of many pro-life Americans are not rooted in intolerance but in the oldest liberal traditions of the protection of the weak.

All this has undermined the pro-choice movement. Its members seem godless in a faithful culture. They have come to seem indifferent to pain, almost glib in the face of human tragedy. Of course, this may not be true in the hearts and minds of many pro-choice activists. But, in the arena of public debate, it is the cold corner into which their rhetoric has condemned them.

How to change? Clinton's approach is the right one. Acknowledge up front the pain of abortion and its moral gravity. Defend its legality only as a terrible compromise necessary for the reduction of abortions in general, for the rights of women to control their own wombs, and for the avoidance of unsafe, amateur abortions. And then move to arenas where liberals need have no qualms: aggressive use of contraception and family planning, expansion and encouragement of adoption, and a rhetorical embrace of the "culture of life." One reason that John Kerry had such a hard time reaching people who have moral qualms about abortion was his record and rhetoric: a relentless defense of abortion rights—even for third-trimester unborn children—with no emphasis on the moral costs of such a callous disregard of human dignity. You cannot have such a record and then hope to convince others that you care about the sanctity of life.

Clinton did one other thing as well. She paid respect to her opponents. She acknowledged the genuine religious convictions of those who oppose all abortion. She recognized how communities of faith have often been the most successful in persuading young women to refrain from teenage sex. She challenged her pro-choice audience by pointing out that "seven percent of American women who do not use contraception account for 53 percent of all unintended pregnancies." She also cited research estimating that 15,000 abortions per year are by women who have been sexually assaulted—one of several reasons, she said, that morning-after emergency contraception should be made available over the counter. By focusing on contraception, she appeals to all those who oppose abortion but who do not follow the abstinence-only movement's rigid restrictions on the surest way to prevent them.

But even this is not enough for the Democrats to move the issue out of its current impasse. The party needs to end its near fatwa on pro-life politicians and spokespeople. Harry Reid and Tim Roemer are a start. The Democrats should learn from President Bush's canny use of the issue. He is firmly pro-life. And yet he gave several pro-choice politicians key slots at the Republican convention. The new number-two at the Republican National Committee, Jo Ann Davidson, is pro-choice. When the Republicans are more obviously tolerant of dissent than Democrats, something has gone awry. One obvious option: Find every way to back Pennsylvania's Robert Casey Jr. in his campaign to wrest a Senate seat from the most extreme and intolerant pro-life absolutist, Rick Santorum. Or take a leaf from Tony Blair's book. In his cabinet, the 36-year-old Education secretary, Ruth Kelly, is adamantly pro-life as a matter of conscience and is even a member of the ultra-conservative Catholic group Opus Dei. Her personal views on this do not impact her political position—or Blair's own support for abortion rights. But her inclusion in the Labour Party shows a recognition that, on such profound moral issues, party lines are inappropriate—and often self-defeating.

In some ways, this does not mean a change of principle. Democrats can still be, and almost certainly should be, for the right to legal abortion. But, instead of beginning their conversation with that right, they should start by acknowledging a wrong. Abortion is always wrong. How can we keep it legal while doing all we can to reduce its damage? Call it a pro-life pro-choice position. And argue for it with moral passion. If you want to win a "values" debate, it helps to advance what Democrats value. And one of those obvious values is the fewer abortions the better. Beyond the polarizing rhetoric, a simple message: saving one precious life at a time.

ANDREW SULLIVAN

Peter Beinart is on leave.

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Green Unbacked

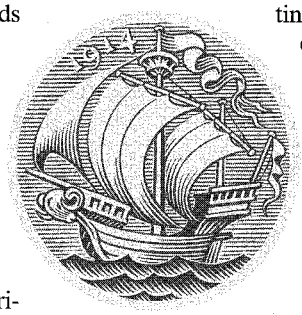
EVERYTHING YOU NEED to know about the Bush administration's dollar policy was encapsulated in Treasury Secretary John Snow's trip to Europe last November. Snow, in a typical speech, told the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London that "our dollar policy remains unchanged, because a strong dollar is in both the national and international interest." But, he also insisted, the Bush administration is a firm believer in letting "market forces" determine the dollar's value. "The only way to get prosperity is to follow the marketplace," he said. The marketplace knew exactly how to interpret Snow's remarks. Following his London speech, the dollar fell to a five-year low against the euro, and it continued to slide for the next six weeks.

Saying that Americans live beyond their means has become something of a cliché. But, as a diagnosis of the dollar's recent malaise, it happens to be exactly right: We import more than we export; we spend more than we save. To make the numbers add up, the rest of the world has to accept a growing supply of dollars. As happens whenever the supply of something increases without a corresponding rise in demand, the value of the dollar has fallen.

Snow knows as well as anyone that there are two ways for the U.S. economy to adjust. First, the dollar can keep losing value until foreign goods become prohibitively expensive and American goods became cheap. This would depress U.S. imports, stimulate exports, and bring the current account deficit back into balance. It also has the virtue of being a relatively painless solution to the underlying problem. The alternative is that Americans can consume less and save more. This would, of course, require some short-term sacrifice. For example, the most obvious way to increase national saving would be to lower the federal budget deficit, currently hovering above $400 billion per year.

In principle, either method can work. In practice, though, once currencies begin to adjust in response to economic imbalances, they often overshoot their targets. The only force restraining them is the belief among investors that the imbalances are being addressed. Absent that reassurance, a gradual dollar slide could easily turn into a rout. Interest rates would spike, the value of the stock market would tank, and the economy would veer toward a deep recession.

Is there any evidence the Bush administration understands this dilemma? None that we can see. Just about every pronouncement the White House has made since winning reelection betrays a blithe disregard for the consequences of the deficit. It has hinted at a proposal for the partial privatization of Social Security that would run up $1 to $2 trillion in new debt over the next decade. It initially attempted to exclude the costs of ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan from its own measure of the deficit. And it has insisted that the baseline for its promise to cut the deficit in half by 2009 is its February 2004 estimate of $521 billion rather than $413 billion, the actual 2004 deficit. (The higher baseline makes halving the deficit roughly $50 billion easier to achieve.)



Unsurprisingly, institutional investors and foreign central banks, the chief holders of U.S. Treasuries, are not buying it. Literally. Speculators are increasingly bearish on the dollar. Even the famously conservative Warren Buffett has plunked down a $20 billion bet against the greenback. Meanwhile, Russia and Indonesia both announced late last year that their central banks may soon begin diversifying into euros. And, just this week, a survey by the London-based Central Banking Publications found that foreign central banks are increasing their euro reserves, most of them to offset lower dollar holdings.

The administration's defenders argue that the dollar can't fall too far: The sheer magnitude of the U.S. economy makes the dollar the de facto currency of international commerce and finance. But the rising prominence of the euro means the dollar is no longer irreplaceable. The Eurozone increasingly rivals the United States in its share of global output, a trend that will only continue as it expands to include countries like Poland and Turkey. And, thanks in part to anti-Americanism (another signature Bush administration achievement), major oil producers may soon begin pricing their exports in euros.

In mid-December, the president told reporters, "We'll do everything we can in the upcoming legislative session to send a signal to the markets that we'll deal with our deficit, which, hopefully, will cause people to want to buy dollars." But, judging from Bush's record so far, "everything we can" means not very much, and a policy based on hope is really no policy at all. ■

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NOTEBOOK

THE MICE ARE HAPPY . . . THE ENEMY'S GAY . . . RICE'S APPROVED . . . TORTURE'S OK

THE RIGHT 'RACES' TO RICE'S DEFENSE

IT IS ALWAYS AMUSING TO WATCH conservatives, who frequently accuse liberals of using bogus charges of racism to silence their critics, attempt to use bogus charges of racism to silence their critics. By the time you read this, Condoleezza Rice will have been confirmed as secretary of state. But the inevitability of her confirmation didn't stop conservatives from crying racism over her treatment at the hands of Senate Democrats, who raised impolite questions about whether Rice had misled the American public and who dared to delay the vote on her confirmation until after President Bush's inauguration so that they could actually debate it. Niger Innis, the spokesman for the right-leaning Congress of Racial Equality, attacked Senator Robert Byrd, who helped delay the Rice vote, calling him a "racist" and "a nonreformed Dixiecrat." Conservative pundit Michelle Malkin wrote, "There's nothing the Left hates more than 'a person of color' who is a person of substance and stature and intellect and independence first." "It's racism any way you cut it," concluded MSNBC's Joe Scarborough.

Now let's review: As national security adviser, Rice has been accused of downplaying the threat of terrorism before September 11. She claimed that Iraq was in imminent danger of acquiring nuclear weapons, citing, among other evidence, a shipment of aluminum tubes whose purpose she knew to be in dispute. She has since refused to acknowledge that her remarks about Iraqi WMD were misleading, claiming instead that those who suggest she has been evasive are only out to "impugn" her integrity. She has refused to answer questions about U.S. policy on torturing terrorism suspects. In addition, critics have described her management style at the National Security Council as "dysfunctional." So yes, as you can see, if Democrats are being mean to Condi, it must be because she's black.

Condoleezza Rice

SADDAM LITE?

BUSH DIDN'T DARE TOUCH ON THE issue of torture in his inaugural address last week. But his speechwriter, Michael Gerson, did include an inspiring line about U.S. support for political prisoners: "America sees you for who you are: the future leaders of your free country." Until that day comes, however, Bush is content to coddle leaders who consider a cattle prod an appropriate response to dissent. Like interim Iraqi Prime Minister Iyad Allawi.

Given the chaos of Iraq, Allawi considers it politically beneficial to portray himself as a strongman. As *The New Yorker* recently reported, Allawi winked at a widespread Baghdad rumor that he had personally executed insurgents at a police station. Americans, an Allawi ally told the magazine, had taken to calling Allawi "Saddam Lite."

But it's not just a posture. This week, Human Rights Watch published the results of a four-month investigation concluding that Allawi's government is engaged in "grave violations of fundamental human rights," including "routine beatings to the body using a variety of implements such as cables, hosepipes and metal rods." It also used "kicking, slapping and punching; prolonged suspension from the wrists with the hands tied behind the back," and electric shocks to the earlobes and genitals. The response of Allawi's government has been to blame Saddam, whose "terrible legacy" is the real reason for the abuse, according to Iraq's interim human rights minister.

In his 2003 State of the Union address, Bush correctly described Saddam's torture chambers by saying, "If this is not evil, then evil has no meaning." Yet he somehow can't find similar condemnation for torture committed by his allies (to say nothing of his own government). Now that Gerson has left his position as chief White House wordsmith, maybe Allawi can hire him.

OF MICE AND MEN

JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT BUSH'S policy on embryonic stem-cell research couldn't get much worse, someone goes and leaves the stem cells out. And the mice get in. According to a study released this Sunday, all existing stem-cell lines eligible for federal research money have been found to be contaminated with mouse molecules, a problem that could take years to undo. If the president hadn't restricted federal funding for research to stem-cell lines created before August 2001, researchers could simply toss the bad batch and start work on another. Now, instead, research could come to a lengthy standstill as technicians try to clean up the problem. All of which just goes to show how unsound the president's "compromise" on stem-cell research was to

DAVID COWLES

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begin with. About the only ones happy with the current outcome are, well, the mice.

CHEMICAL WARFARE WATCH

"CHEMICALS THAT ATTRACT ANNOYing creatures to the enemy position and make the creatures aggressive and annoying." This somewhat less-than-not-redundant idea comes from a list of proposals by the U.S. Air Force's Wright Laboratory in Dayton, Ohio. The document, titled "Harrassing, Annoying and 'Bad Guy' Identifying Chemicals," recently came to light thanks to *New Scientist* magazine, which apparently took the time to inspect newly declassified Pentagon records.

Some of the proposals have awakened particular interest, among them "a low toxicity compound of [redacted] that still retains the characteristics of [redacted] (severe and lasting halitosis) for those exposed to small concentrations." Also on the front line against terrorism could be chemicals acting to disrupt "discipline and morale in enemy units," such as "aphrodisiacs, especially if the chemical also caused homosexual behavior." But, if the prospect of torturing Osama bin Laden and company with insatiable homosexual longings combined with hideous breath seems inviting, so, too, do some of the more sophisticated suggestions in the report, many of which center on exposing the enemy to chemicals to which only we would have the antidote, forcing them to surrender to us.

The only problem, though, is that few of these suggestions are currently in what one might call an advanced stage. Under the "New Discoveries Needed" section, the report lists, um, everything. Well, except for one thing: "Many chemicals are known that cause exposed personnel to stink badly." It is a relief, of course, to know we already have that under our belt. And, when we see B-52s dropping bushels of *The Advocate* into Waziristan, we'll know we're really making progress. ■

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&c.

NOAM SCHEIBER

SOCIAL CONSERVATIVES LIKE THEIR SOCIAL SECURITY, TOO: *The New York Times* reported on January 25 that leading conservative evangelicals have written a letter advising the administration not to count on their support for Social Security privatization unless it gets religion, so to speak, on gay marriage. The most fascinating paragraph of the piece:

> Several members of the group said that not long ago, many of their supporters were working or middle class, members of families that felt more allegiance to the Democratic Party because of programs like Social Security before gravitating to the Republican Party as it took up more cultural conservative issues over the last 20 years.

I actually think this is one of the sleeper political considerations surrounding Social Security. Republicans have been winning over Reagan Democrat–types for the last two decades because, for these people, moral values increasingly trump economic concerns. But, when it comes to Social Security, the issue is pretty much entirely about economics—without any offsetting moral-value considerations. That's why I think the real potential for Republican defections isn't among socially moderate, fiscally conservative types like Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins. It's among social conservatives from overwhelmingly blue-collar districts—parts of Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, upstate New York, et cetera—many of whom are now members of the Republican Party. *The American Prospect*'s Matthew Yglesias points out that Gary Bauer opposed Social Security privatization on the campaign trail in 2000. It's also interesting to note that two members of blogger Josh Marshall's "conscience caucus" (i.e., Republicans leaning against privatization)—represent heavily blue-collar districts in West Virginia and Virginia (Shelley Moore Capito and Virgil Goode, respectively).

In fact, it's precisely because the representatives who fit this profile are such good candidates for breaking ranks with the White House that this letter from anti-gay-marriage activists worries me. If the administration works out a deal in which it makes some apparently earnest (but ultimately futile) effort to push the anti-gay-marriage amendment, then it may succeed in keeping these blue-collar Republicans on board with Social Security privatization when they might otherwise have jumped ship.

IRAQ'D

SPENCER ACKERMAN

A RARE GOOD NEWS DAY: On January 25, the *Times* reported that Sunni leaders are indicating that they want to participate in constitution-writing:

> "Certainly because we withdrew from the elections, that doesn't mean we won't be part of the drafting of the constitution," said Sheik Ibrahim al-Adhami, a senior member of the Muslim Scholars Association, which says it represents 3,000 mosques and is the most influential Sunni group to call for an election boycott. "The elections are one matter; the constitution is another."
>
> "All the Sunnis must take part in drafting the constitution," added Sheik Adhami, who is the imam of Abu Hanifa Mosque, possibly the most anti-American mosque in Baghdad.

That's cause for a big sigh of relief. Even the most rejectionist Sunnis—the Association of Muslim Scholars—aren't abandoning the political process wholesale. As the *Times* reports, there's a possibility that the Sunnis will transfer their rejectionism to inside the constitution-drafting, using the prospect of uniting three Sunni provinces to veto ratification and press for their interests. In principle, that's nothing to object to: That's politics, especially in an ethnically diverse country. The danger is that the Sunnis, as the *Times* reports, consider themselves trapped "between catering to [their] anti-American constituency and staying politically involved"—and might advance unachievable objectives, destabilizing the entire process.

Which means it's up to the future Shia government to convince the Sunnis that the entire political process is in their interest. According to the *Times*, the Iraqi Islamic Party is ruling out taking positions in the government, which the United Iraqi Alliance seems to be offering. Negotiating a U.S. troop withdrawal is probably the surest way for a Shia government to win Sunni investment in the process. And keeping the 120,000 U.S. troops in Iraq through 2006 doesn't serve that vital purpose. But the Sunnis are indicating that it's possible to fracture the insurgency and save the process. The window won't stay open long—but it's good to hear that it won't close on January 30.

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Banda Aceh Dispatch

Skimmed

BY ANDREW MARSHALL

THE GOVERNOR OF the Indonesian province of Aceh, Abdullah Puteh, easily survived the tsunami that killed more than 173,000 Indonesians last month. At the time, he was safe in his cell at Salemba Penitentiary in central Jakarta, 1,000 miles away, awaiting trial for a million-dollar scam involving a gubernatorial helicopter. The aging, Russian-made Mi-2 now gathers dust in a remote hangar at the airport in the provincial capital of Banda Aceh, a Cyrillic-script instruction manual helpfully stuffed into its lifeless console. Nearby stand crates of food, medicine, and other foreign aid destined for Aceh's tsunami-blasted communities, much of it brought here by sleek U.S. Navy helicopters, which, thankfully, function better than Puteh's.

The trial of Aceh's governor, which began a day after the tsunami struck, is being closely watched in Indonesia. It is the first high-profile graft case during the three-month-old presidency of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, who has vowed to fight the country's rampant corruption, which enrages ordinary Indonesians and scares off foreign investors. But the trial also has implications for the millions of people around the world who donated tsunami aid, and for the thousands of people in Aceh now trying to deliver it.

ACEH IS ARGUABLY the most corrupt province in one of the world's most corrupt countries. International graft watchdog Transparency International places Indonesia alongside the Democratic Republic of Congo, a war-ravaged dictatorship, near the bottom of its list of most corrupt nations. And, in a report released last week, the local NGO Indonesian Corruption Watch (ICW) gave Aceh a low ranking among the country's 32 provinces. The ICW conceded that this was "merely the tip of an iceberg of increasing corruption." Much goes unreported. In addition to the helicopter-related charges, investigators also claim Puteh deposited over $400,000 of the provincial budget in his personal bank account. When Indonesian Vice President Jusuf Kalla departed for Aceh carrying the cash equivalent of $540,000 in tsunami aid, one alarmed parliamentarian publicly warned that the province's thieving officials tended to "fish for great catches in murky waters." Corruption even shapes the post–December 26 cityscape of Banda Aceh. Beyond the tsunami's lethal reach, most Dutch colonial-era buildings conspicuously survived the quake. Many modern government offices, by contrast, built by corrupt, substandard contractors, are rubble.

While Puteh is hardly an innocent scapegoat—ordinary Acehnese loathe him—his trial is a distraction from a much larger problem. The province is controlled by the Indonesian military, known as the TNI, which for nearly three decades has fought separatists of the Free Aceh Movement, or GAM. TNI commanders in Aceh not only manage an array of legitimate companies, which form part of a vast and never-audited business empire, but they also run highly lucrative rackets in smuggling, logging, and extortion. In May 2003, after a cease-fire with GAM collapsed, the Indonesian government set out to crush the rebels. Over 40,000 soldiers and armed police were deployed to Aceh to fight a 5,000-strong enemy. Jakarta allocated more than $440 million for the offensive, a sum roughly equivalent to three times Aceh's provincial budget; much of this was later reported missing by government-appointed auditors.

FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS AND international agencies have pledged some $4 billion to Asia's tsunami-struck nations, with much of it destined for ravaged Aceh. How much long-term aid actually reaches the needy, however, depends largely on the Indonesian military and on the government that supposedly commands it. Supposedly, because in Aceh, the TNI is a law unto itself. Many Acehnese see the TNI offensive against GAM as a campaign of terrorism. The alleged torture of suspected rebels and their sympathizers—beatings, cigarette burns, and electric shocks—was "standard operating procedure" for the security forces in Aceh, according to a Jakarta foreign embassy official quoted in a September 2004 Human Rights Watch report.

Aceh has large reserves of oil and natural gas, although little of this natural wealth benefits the people, creating local grievances. Lhokseumawe, the town nearest to the oil fields, is a dreary huddle of low-rise concrete. This economic dispossession, combined with unchecked abuses by soldiers and police, helps explain the anger of so many Acehnese. Earlier this month, the Paris Club of rich creditor nations agreed to offer Indonesia a debt moratorium, supposedly to free up funds for rebuilding tsunami-hit areas. "Even in disaster," remarked local anti-corruption activist Akhiruddin Mahjuddin, "Aceh gives the rest of the country a blessing."

Foreign aid groups were banned from Aceh before the tsunami, likely so aid workers wouldn't stumble across TNI abuses. Now they are back in unprecedented numbers. Banda Aceh's residents are awoken at first light by the clatter of aid helicopters bound for the devastated west coast. Outside public buildings, heartbreaking leaflets bearing the names and faces of missing people are slowly being replaced by advertisements in English offering translation services or cars for rent. The vendor outside Zaini Abidin Hospital now sells his fragrant clove cigarettes for American dollars, not Indonesian rupiah.

Andrew Marshall covers Asia for TIME.

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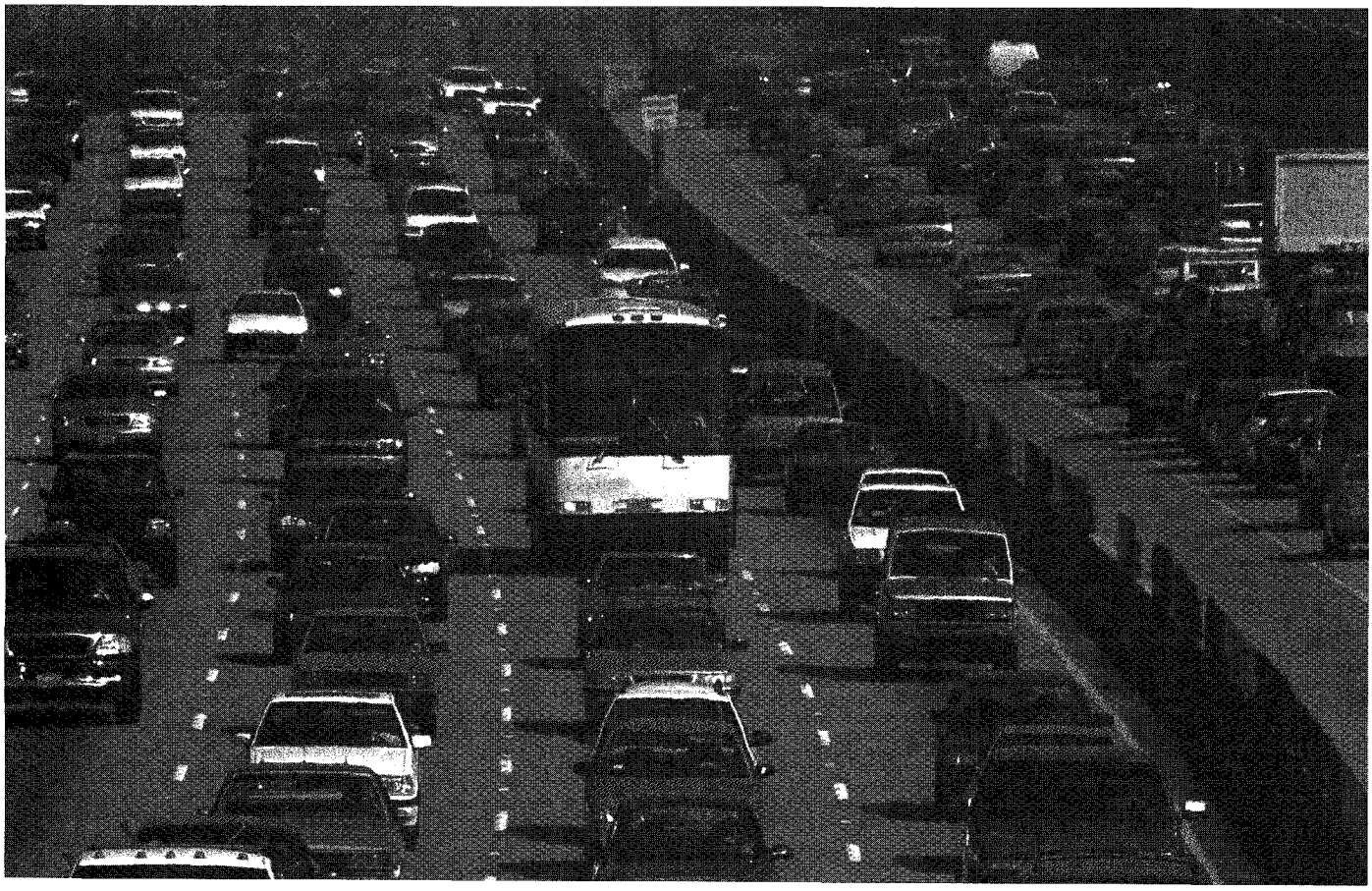
Most Americans Want Immigration Drastically Reduced



Tens of Millions are determined to come here – legally or illegally.

Two out of three Americans think overall immigration should be cut to less than half the current level of 1.5 million a year, according to a March 2003 poll taken by RoperASW for Negative Population Growth, Inc.

More than two out of three of those polled believe illegal immigration should be reduced to "near zero," using tough enforcement measures against violators such as mandatory detention and forfeiture of property, followed by deportation. Over 80 percent favor heavy fines and criminal penalties for employers who persistently hire illegal aliens.

For the preservation of our resources and environment now and for the future, and to protect the wages and standard of living of both Americans and immigrant workers, illegal immigration must be stopped and legal immigration drastically reduced. Americans are clear and determined on what's needed to bring it down. For complete poll results visit our website: www.npg.org and click on "national poll."

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The relief effort has been massive, multinational, and erratically coordinated: The hospital in remote Meulaboh had 14 foreign surgeons for only five patients, while at Sigli, a two-hour drive from Banda Aceh, 1,000 refugees were packed into a camp with no working latrines. It has also thrown together unlikely bedfellows—witness Greenpeace's yacht, *The Rainbow Warrior*, plying the same waters as the warship U.S.S. *Abraham Lincoln*. The Islamic Defenders Front, an Indonesian extremist group, came to Aceh to help collect corpses and to monitor Westerners, particularly Americans, whose warships "usually have prostitutes onboard," the Defenders' local leader told the BBC. And, opposite the governor's residence, foreign Scientologists are giving free massages.

And, unfortunately, because it's operating in one of the most corrupt and military-dominated places on earth, the relief effort, too, is being tainted. Several foreign aid agencies have praised the response of the TNI. Yet, even in unifying times of disaster, the TNI has barely let its guard down, with troops carrying assault rifles even when the weapons interfere with pressing tasks, such as heaving corpses onto trucks. Indonesian soldiers have quickly resumed familiar habits of terrorism and intimidation. Just days after the tsunami, soldiers reportedly executed five refugees they believed were GAM sympathizers. At another camp, traumatized refugees told me how soldiers had fired shots into the ground before patrolling the muddy lanes for rebel suspects. One refugee, a farmer whose home and rice fields the tsunami had devoured, believed the only brake on the soldiers' behavior was the presence at the camp of two foreign aid agencies. "The foreigners must stay in Aceh," he said mournfully. "They are our only protection."

Foreign soldiers, including Americans, have already received their marching orders: The TNI wants them out of Aceh by March 26. Foreign aid groups—and journalists—now wonder when their turn will come. Privately, aid workers express fears that the TNI will begin to restrict their movements. This, they believe, will hamper reconstruction and, by removing independent scrutiny over how aid is distributed, fuel corruption. But, without restrictions, the foreigners will inevitably draw unwanted attention to the TNI's brutal prosecution of the Aceh war. For example, foreign psychologists already dispatched to counsel survivors might soon find themselves treating the pre-tsunami trauma caused by military atrocities.

Those atrocities will likely continue. Despite conciliatory murmurs from Jakarta about peace talks with GAM, the Indonesian military likely has no desire to negotiate. TNI General Ryamizard Ryacudu claims that, since the tsunami, his soldiers have killed 208 GAM rebels for stealing relief aid. The claim is unconvincing and impossible to verify, but the stance of Ryacudu, a nationalist hard-liner, is clear: Peace talks will only allow a near-vanquished enemy to regroup.

President Yudhoyono, meanwhile, has appointed Ernst & Young to independently audit tsunami funds. That is unlikely to discourage military-linked companies, who "always have a very keen eye for making a dollar," notes Australian academic Damien Kingsbury, an expert on TNI business activities. According to anti-corruption activist Akhiruddin, one firm angling for a Halliburton-sized chunk of Aceh's reconstruction business is Jakarta-based corporate giant Artha Graha, of which, according to Kingsbury, the TNI owns 30 percent. Artha Graha is run by banking and real-estate billionaire Tomy Winata, who helped bankroll the campaign of President Yudhoyono, himself a retired general. Banda Aceh's streets are now bedecked with banners proclaiming in Indonesian, ARTHA GRAHA CARES, although the warehouse it operates near the airport is empty, apart from some heavily armed soldiers.

LAST WEEK, ABDULLAH PUTEH was temporarily released from jail for a three-day trip to his home province. And so the disgraced governor finally saw the aftermath of what many Acehnese believed at the time was *hari kiamat*—Judgment Day. As funds continue to pour into the region, minor instances of corruption are already being reported: the inflation of refugee numbers by local officials, the theft of medical supplies by distributors. With multimillion-dollar infrastructure projects up for grabs, along with epic profits, all eyes are on Indonesia and its all-powerful military. The brave but desperate people of Aceh have endured their judgment day. Their government's has yet to come. ■

Bush's hypocritical oath.

Speak No Evil

BY HUSAIN HAQQANI

PRESIDENT BUSH'S INAUGURAL speech was delivered on the day Muslims around the world celebrated Eid Ul Azha, the festival marking the end of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, the Hajj. But, as soon as it was over, the state-run news media of authoritarian U.S. allies in the Middle East were quick to criticize it. Egypt's *Al Ahram* lamented that Bush made no reference to either Iraq or Palestine, the two most important issues in the region Bush hopes most to democratize. In the same vein, Saudi Arabia's *Al-Watan* noted, " 'To end tyranny in our world,' as Bush said in his speech, is a highly rhetorical statement and titillating lyrics. ... Will Bush ever grant Palestinians their rights and return their land?"

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Khaled Al Maeena, editor of the Saudi daily *Arab News*, matched Bush's rhetoric with rhetoric of his own: "No right-minded Arab man, woman, or child would like to live under tyranny. ... We also have a dream—like the American Dream—of upward mobility, of bettering ourselves, of providing a better future for our children. For all this we need peace." But then, turning Bush's words against U.S. support for Israel, Al Maeena wrote, "President Bush said: 'No one is fit to be a master, and no one deserves to be a slave.' And we want to hold him to his words. The Israelis cannot be masters of a land they occupied in June 1967, and the Palestinians cannot be slaves in their own land."

Coming as they did from the press organs of decidedly undemocratic states, such responses could be written off as self-serving and hypocritical. But pro-Western intellectuals and democracy activists in the Arab world were even more dismissive of Bush's speech. They focused not only on U.S. support for Israel and occupation of Iraq, but also on support for Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and other authoritarian governments. "How can one talk of democracy when Washington protects many tyrannical regimes for the sake of its own interests?" asked Rafiq Khouri, a columnist for Beirut's *Al Nahar* newspaper, questioning Bush's declaration that "America's vital interests and our deepest beliefs are now one." And the London-based *Al Quds Al Arabi* wrote, "The Arab hates America for two main reasons: first, for its support of repressive, barbaric and backward regimes; and secondly, for its support of the Israeli aggression. As long as US policy remains the same, all US speeches about democracy and freedom will only be pretentious and meaningless."

THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION professes bewilderment at this skepticism and hostility. It apparently feels that people living under the region's authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes should greet its rhetoric with the same enthusiasm that cold war dissidents in Eastern Europe once greeted Ronald Reagan's calls for freedom and denunciations of evil. But, during the cold war, the United States openly opposed the communist regimes behind the Iron Curtain. At no time did the United States embrace or prop up Walter Ulbricht's German Democratic Republic or Gustav Husak's Czechoslovakia. At no time were such states treated with the deference accorded critical allies. American officials did not offer false praise for East European rulers, describing incremental political restructuring as "progress toward democracy," in return for specific policy favors.

By contrast, in the Middle East, the United States is seen as the principal backer of rulers like Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak and the Saudi royal family. In Central Asia, America is seen as supporting dictatorships in Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan. In South Asia, Muslim democrats can derive little comfort from the praise Washington heaps upon Pakistan's military ruler, General Pervez Musharraf, who seized power in a 1999 coup, purged the country's Supreme Court, arbitrarily amended its constitution, and has never stood for election in a contested campaign.

Indeed, the gap between Bush's pro-democracy rhetoric and his pro–status quo policies was illustrated during a White House meeting the president had with Musharraf in December, during which he called for "a world effort to help the Palestinians develop a state that is truly free: One that's got an independent judiciary; one that's got a civil society; one that's got the capacity to fight off the terrorists; one that allows for dissent; one in which people can vote." Ironically, most of those criteria are not met in Pakistan.

Zayn Al Abidin Al Rukabi, writing in the London-based *Al Sharq Al Awsat*, suggests that Bush's inaugural address gave his administration "a unique chance, the best ever, to restore trust in true US values, as well as improving an image which has been distorted by its mistakes." But, to seize that chance, Bush will have to find a way to match his words with deeds. He might begin by refusing to allow America's Muslim allies to define democratic progress as cosmetic political changes, such as the creation of rubber-stamp parliaments and the holding of fixed elections. Mubarak, for example, claims that Egypt has been engaged in a gradual transition to democracy for over two decades. As a result, his country receives considerable aid for civil society projects despite little true reform. Muslim liberals understand that temporary alliances with autocrats are sometimes necessary even for democracies. But a friendly dictator should be called just that, and not described as the builder of a future democracy.

Another practical step could be active U.S. engagement with opposition leaders and parties in Islamic countries. The United States could bolster Egypt's conservative Al Wafd party, the newly formed liberal Al Ghad party, and the Islamic democrats in the officially unrecognized Al Wasat party—as well as the popular civilian parties in Pakistan that Musharraf accuses of misgoverning the country before he took power. Since the days of Iran's shah, authoritarian Muslim rulers have demanded that the United States shun their opposition as the price of their alliance, and the United States has obliged them. Administration officials and diplomats try to avoid high-profile meetings with opposition leaders in Washington and abroad for fear of antagonizing U.S.-friendly dictators. Furthermore, democracy-promotion assistance is almost never extended to political parties or media that might threaten existing regimes. Changing this policy would allow U.S. nongovernmental organizations, such as the National Democratic Institute, to use money from the U.S. Agency for International Development to provide logistical help for political party-building activities similar to those undertaken in Eastern Europe and Latin America. To be sure, it would provoke the occasional heated exchange between the regimes and American diplomats. But it is unlikely that regimes like Mubarak's and Musharraf's would withhold cooperation from the United States (and forgo the benefits in economic and military aid) because of increased U.S. engagement with their opposition. And engagement might eventually give Washington's democrats an alternative to dealing with the world's dictators. ■

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On The Hill

Paper Tiger

BY MICHAEL CROWLEY

If George W. Bush's Social Security reform fails, people may look back at January 18 as the day the wheels really started to come off. That was the afternoon House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Bill Thomas pronounced Bush's plan a "dead horse" that Congress would not pass. Thomas also suggested that any changes to Social Security would involve elaborate tax reform of the sort that can take more than a year, far longer than the few weeks the White House is hoping to devote to Social Security. Thomas even heretically disputed the very notion that Social Security faces a fiscal "crisis," as the Bush administration has obsessively argued, and went so far as to needle the president by noting how Bush himself had used the markedly less alarmist word "problem" dozens of times in a recent speech. This was the sort of thing you might expect to hear from, say, Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid, not the chairman whose committee will write the first iteration of any Social Security bill this spring. ("It's not an argument Democrats would disagree with," says one Democratic aide.) Making matters worse, in a subsequent appearance on "Meet the Press," Thomas mused eccentrically about adjusting benefits and the retirement age according to race and gender—something Democrats, who quickly issued mocking press releases, do disagree with, along with most Americans.

For a Bush White House that demands militant message precision, this was more than an annoyance—it was a debacle. Sure enough, White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan was hammered with reporters' questions about whether Bush's plan was stillborn. Speaking to *The Washington Times*, the perennially optimistic GOP supply-side activist Stephen Moore conceded that Thomas's remarks suggest "the chance of getting reform done this year is looking to be unlikely." Even some congressional Democrats—who, like shell-shocked soldiers, live in constant fear of the next GOP bombardment—allowed themselves to celebrate. One senior Senate Democratic aide wrote the following gleeful message from her Blackberry: "TKO[ed] WH plan for SS in round 1."

Such exuberance may be premature, especially if Bill Thomas is the basis for it. While it may sound like Thomas intends to suck Social Security reform into the legislative mud and smother it, that is not likely. To the contrary, the obstreperous chairman has a well-established habit of causing short-term confusion within GOP ranks with his know-it-all soliloquies—but then falling into line at crunch time. Thomas may be mercurial, arrogant, obnoxious, outspoken, and highly off-message. But, when this White House wants something, Thomas delivers.

Few people remember now, but there was a time when the House Ways and Means chairman was a figure of titanic significance—often second in power only to the president himself. In January 1963, the committee's Democratic chairman, Wilbur Mills, was featured on the cover of *Time* magazine. (Mills was powerful enough to block, almost singlehandedly, the creation of Medicare for several years.) The next great Ways and Means chairman was another Democrat, Dan Rostenkowski, a Washington institution known as much for his steak-and-martini consumption as for being at the center of such epic Capitol battles as the 1983 Social Security reform, the 1986 tax reform, and the 1993 Clinton budget plan.

When Republicans took control of the House in 1994, they imposed six-year term limits on the chairmanships of Ways and Means and every other committee. Chairmen today simply don't have the time to establish themselves as warlords like Mills, who served for 18 years, and Rostenkowski, who served for 14. It takes a few years to make a legislative mark—or to get your face among the political-celebrity caricatures that adorn the walls of the Palm steakhouse.

But Thomas is no hack. Indeed, he is widely acknowledged to be one of the smartest members of Congress, particularly when it comes to gruelingly detailed policy like Medicare and Social Security. He won the title of "brainiest" House member in *Washingtonian* magazine's 2004 "Best and Worst of Congress" awards. "Intellectually, he's at the top of the heap on their side," notes one Democratic aide who frequently sees Thomas up close.

Unfortunately, Thomas seems forever cognizant of this fact, making him wildly intolerant of anyone who doesn't match his mental heft. As a result, Thomas didn't just win the award for "brainiest," but also for "meanest" and "hottest temper" (the latter in a runaway). You can sense his volcanic core just by listening to him. An unwavering tone of sarcasm, reminiscent of the late comedian Phil Hartman, oozes from his voice like lava. And his volatility is a constant source of mayhem. Most famously, in July of 2003, he called the Capitol Police in a fury after exasperated Democrats marched out of a Ways and Means hearing and tried to have them evicted from a committee library. (Thomas later issued a bizarre, tearful apology on the House floor.) But Thomas's mean spirit is apparent in even mundane interactions. In 1997, a tipster told *The Washington Post* that Thomas, driving his Porsche near the Capitol, became furious when a van stopped to pick up pedestrians, blocking his path. After blaring his horn, Thomas pulled around and cut off the van at a 45-degree angle—in what the witness described as "a totally '70s cop-show driving maneuver" that was "right out of 'Magnum, P.I.' "—before storming off to find a police officer. One former House staffer reports boarding a Capitol elevator with Thomas and seeing him "vigorously" jab the DOOR CLOSE button as a group of tourists approached. When the doors shut in their faces, Thomas gleefully chuckled out loud, the aide says, "like a cartoon villain."

Thomas can also be unpredictable—though less spectac-

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ularly so—in the policy arena. His smarts seem to make him unwilling simply to accept diktats from 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue—at least at first. Thus, it has become a familiar ritual for him to dump cold water on major Bush initiatives bound for his committee by warning of the myriad compromises and modifications that will be necessary—as was the case with his remarks about Social Security last week—thereby showing off his policy brilliance. Predictably, this raises the hopes of Democrats, who imagine that Thomas will assume the role of Mills and shoot down Bush's proposals. Unfortunately for them, however, Thomas's sound and fury rarely signify anything. In the end, the White House gets what it wants.

Consider Bush's 2001 tax cut. Back then, as now, Bush had just narrowly won a presidential election, and Democrats were insisting that he lacked the mandate to push a major fiscal change. Bush stubbornly insisted that he would plow ahead with his full $1.6 trillion tax cut, saying that compromise was impossible. But Thomas seemed to raise doubts. In January of 2001, he warned of a "process of accommodation" over the tax cut and, "[g]iven the results of the election, no one is going to get everything they want," he added. Yet Thomas's committee ultimately passed Bush's tax cut in almost exactly the form the White House wanted. And, in negotiations with the Senate, Thomas and his House colleagues gave virtually no ground, winning Bush more than 80 percent of the tax cut he desired.

It was a similar story when it came to the GOP's agonizing passage of a Medicare prescription-drug bill in late 2003. Thomas initially withheld his support from a White House plan until he could see its specific details. Then he threatened to derail painstaking negotiations with the Senate if his demand that Medicare be forced to compete with private insurers was not met. During one negotiating session, he so abusively berated Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson that Bush himself placed an angry call to House Speaker Dennis Hastert. Ultimately, however, Thomas helped to usher the bill through some intense intraparty opposition to secure its passage in the House. "Thomas takes problems that aren't particularly difficult, makes them ten times harder than they otherwise would be, and then manages to pull out a victory at the last minute that makes him look terrific," says the Democratic aide who sees the chairman up close.

REPUBLICANS WEREN'T HAPPY with Thomas's contribution to the GOP's already muddled Social Security message. One House Republican aide who specializes in Social Security pauses cautiously at the question of what Thomas was trying to accomplish. "I'm not quite sure. I really have no idea." Asked whether Thomas's comments had been helpful to the cause, Michael Tanner, a key Social Security privatization booster at the Cato Institute, offers a flat "no." But Tanner has seen enough of Thomas to know not to worry too much. "I think, to some extent, this is Bill Thomas making sure everybody realized he's still there, and that this has to go through him, and that people should pay attention to him."

Democrats, as they often do, suspect a conspiracy is afoot. "He wants to be in the center of the action," agrees Democrat Sander Levin, a Ways and Means member and a House Democratic point man on Social Security. Yet Levin is also convinced that, just as Thomas demanded provisions laying the groundwork for a possible privatization of Medicare, the chairman is determined to pass private savings accounts that will begin to phase out Social Security. "I think he likes to do it his way, but that his way in the end won't differ from what the White House wants," Levin says. Others note that Thomas is thought to be interested in winning an extension of his term on Ways and Means, which is set to expire in 2007—giving him yet another reason to be a good team player. After all, as Tanner notes, Republicans may already be politically committed to the success of Social Security reform. "What's much worse for the members of the House is to attempt Social Security and fail," Tanner says. "If you get [reform], and the checks still go out to seniors in 2006, the [Democratic] scare tactics are over. But, if you try and fail, then everyone says, 'Aha! If they had succeeded, then you wouldn't be getting your checks.'" All of which suggests that, while some Democrats may see Bill Thomas as a heroic dissident, when all is said and done, he may turn out to be just another House GOP apparatchik. ■

Sulaymaniya Dispatch

Party Foul

BY ANNIA CIEZADLO

TO SEE WHAT Iraq will look like after January 30, just look north: Here in Kurdistan, the election is already over, even before anyone has cast a ballot. The two ruling parties, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), have carved out most of the seats in Kurdistan's regional parliament. And, in the upcoming national election, most people here will vote for the two partners' combined slate; few have even heard of the independent tickets. "The only thing I know is that the election is between ethnic groups like Kurds and Arabs," says Dashne Khaled, an 18-year-old Kurd from the northern city of Irbil, which is controlled by Massoud Barzani's KDP. "So, if you're a Kurd, you vote for the Kurds, and if you're an Arab, you vote for the Arabs." And, in the PUK-controlled slice of Kurdistan, an

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old woman declares her loyalty to "Uncle Jalal," PUK leader Jalal Talabani, with an eerie echo of Saddam Hussein's old campaign slogan. Throwing her hands heavenward, she intones, "With my fingers, with my hands, with my whole body, I will vote for you, Talabani!"

Welcome to free Kurdistan, supposedly a thriving democracy in northern Iraq. According to *The Washington Post*, Iraq's Kurdish region is a "flourishing quasi-state" with "democratic elections and institutions." Other major U.S. media offer similar assessments, and Kurdish party leaders like to tell foreign journalists that their region can be a model for the rest of Iraq. They're right—but it's hardly a positive example: In fact, the region is actually a warning to the rest of Iraq. Kurdistan is a case study in what happens when nationalist political parties consolidate too much power, depriving citizens of what they really want—which, in Kurdistan, is independence.

IN EARLY DECEMBER, the two Kurdish parties announced that they would run together for the national assembly and for the autonomous Kurdish parliament. Together, they formed a unified, unbeatable ticket—giving Kurds about as much choice as if, in last year's presidential election, George W. Bush had decided to merge with the Democrats and make John Kerry his vice president.

As a result, instead of making Kurdistan more democratic, the upcoming national elections are cementing the rule of the dominant parties here—a trend being repeated across Iraq. "Kurds, when they go to vote on January 30, are not going to vote for whoever protects their interests," says Hiwa Osman, a Kurdish political analyst. "They're going to vote for whoever is powerful enough to protect them from Arabs. Shiites are not going to vote for whoever has good governance—they are going to vote for whoever can protect them from the Sunnis."

Kurdistan is still recovering from its last election, held in 1992, when the region was protected from Saddam by a U.S. no-fly zone. After smaller parties were disqualified, the PUK and the KDP both claimed victory, and, in 1996, their simmering hostilities erupted into a full-blown civil war. In the next two elections, for municipal and student body governments, the two parties brutally suppressed any other groups. University students campaigning for Islamic parties were told bluntly by their professors—themselves installed by hacks from the two major parties—to back off or flunk their exams. "The tactics were quite ruthless. They ranged from arbitrary detentions of candidates for several days to beatings—quite severe beatings—of people planning to run against them," says Christoph Wilcke, a Kurdistan analyst for the International Crisis Group, adding dryly that support for parties other than the PUK and the KDP "might be broader than what is apparent."

Today, in fact, Kurdistan resembles a Soviet satellite state. Intelligence agents lurk everywhere, and those who threaten party power may find themselves languishing in prison. Everything is taxed. Party-run satellite channels broadcast endless footage of the party leaders and their press conferences. Independent candidates are virtually unknown. And, if you want a job, from hotel clerk to college professor, you would do well to join your local ruling party. In fact, there are few democratic institutions in Kurdistan. Even the 105-member Kurdish parliament is little more than a rubber stamp; party leaders make the real decisions in the KDP stronghold of Salahuddin—carefully maintaining a continual state of negotiated deadlock—and then notify the supposed lawmakers. "No parliament has power over these parties," says Shwan Mahmood, political editor of the independent Kurdish newspaper *Hawlati*. "Massoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani see themselves as above parliament." According to Amnesty International, both parties committed gross human rights violations throughout the '90s, from torture to summary executions.

Hawlati is a rarity in Kurdistan, where the media landscape is choked with shamelessly partisan newspapers like *Khabat*, which proclaims without irony that it is the "Party Organ of the KDP." Both *Khabat* and its PUK counterpart, the region's only dailies, revel in excruciatingly detailed accounts of their patrons' activities. Criticism of the party leaders is rare; deviation from the party line is almost never permitted. After the invasion of Iraq in March 2003, the parties warned journalists not to call coalition troops "occupying forces," ordering them to say "liberators" instead. "They were calling themselves 'occupation authorities,' so why should we avoid using that term?" laughs Azad Seddiq, host of the popular TV talk show "Didar" ("Interview") on Kurdsat, the PUK's satellite channel. "Unfortunately, we are repeating some of the worst habits of the Baathist regime."

THE SADDEST IRONY of all is that, free of any need to answer to the public, the parties can afford to ignore the Kurds' most burning desire: independence. While it's hardly a practical goal at the moment—neighboring Turkey, Syria, and Iran have made it quite clear they would respond drastically to such a move—the majority of Kurds want a government that will at least acknowledge that desire. And, before the national elections, it seemed Kurdistan was beginning to liberalize and even to consider acknowledging the popularity of independence. After the Iraq war, a group of Kurdish doctors, lawyers, poets, and exiles founded a mass movement to demand that Kurdistan hold a referendum asking Kurds if they want independence. In two weeks in February 2004, the movement gathered 1.7 million signatures—about half of Kurdistan's population of approximately 3.6 million—supporting a referendum. Their plan was to deliver the signatures to the United Nations that summer and simultaneously hold demonstrations. Many of the referendum movement's leaders also dared to criticize Kurdish party leaders, publishing articles on pro-independence websites. It seemed as though Kurdistan's closed civil society was slowly breaking open.

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But then the run-up to the national elections began. The parties cracked down on the referendum movement, banning more mass demonstrations and preventing the local organizers from delivering the signatures abroad. When the United Nations finally deigned to welcome the stateless Kurds, on December 22, 2004, the quiet handover of their petitions garnered barely any attention—just as the parties had planned. "The PUK and KDP are afraid that, if there are mass demonstrations, it will look to the Americans like they don't support the elections," says Kamal Mirawdeli, one of the movement's organizers. "So they put pressure on people in Kurdistan not to have demonstrations."

At the same time, the parties were busy convincing homegrown opposition groups outside the referendum movement to close ranks. The national elections gave the Kurdish parties an airtight argument against dissent: the Shia. By skillfully invoking the specter of Iranian-style theocracy, the two parties have convinced most Kurds—including smaller parties opposed to the PUK and the KDP—that it was their patriotic duty to join with the unified ticket and avoid splitting the Kurdish vote. "Separate lists would lead to internal conflict—and, in the long run, could hurt all of us," says Muhammad Haji Mahmud, head of the independent Kurdistan Socialist Democratic Party, which had originally planned to run independently. "If Kurds run in one list, it will help determine their percentage in Iraq, so that everybody knows their numbers, and there will be no split in the vote."

Not exactly the flowering of democracy the Iraqi elections were supposed to encourage. When the United Nations selected Iraq's electoral method, proportional representation, one of its selling points was that it allowed for minority representation. But the necessity of running in a national election, combined with the U.N.'s other choice—making Iraq into a single electoral district—transformed that strength into a weakness. Because the formula discriminates against independent candidates, it encourages small players to form coalitions instead of going it alone. The hope was that, by joining together, parties would join in that great parlor game of democracy, "coalition-building." It worked all too well, with Kurds and Shia congealing into two massive mega-slates based solely on religious and ethnic identity. And, just as the Shia super-slate forced smaller parties to join or risk losing the chance of getting any seats, the combined Kurdish ticket effectively forced all the smaller parties to align themselves with the PUK and the KDP or be lost.

WHAT CAN BE done as Iraq prepares for elections that appear certain to harden internal divisions and keep undemocratic parties in power? Some experts think Iraq's nascent democratic movements would fare better in local elections. In fact, local elections in Kurdistan are the one exception to party hegemony: While smaller parties like Mahmud's joined the combined Kurdish ticket for the regional and national elections, they are running independently on the local ballot. "Iraqis would vote for different candidates if other sects were not going to be a threat," says Osman. "They would vote for alternatives, and you would see moderate elements begin to emerge. Hard-liners of each group would have to move to the center. Instead, because of fear of dominance, we're electing warlords."

Or worse. "For me, it's no different whether we have an Arab Saddam or a Kurdish Saddam," says Mirawdeli. "We need a real, genuine civil society. We don't want nationalism to mask some kind of dictatorship, which is what is happening in Kurdistan." ■

The tragic end to a liberal Iraq.

The Last Casualty

BY LAWRENCE F. KAPLAN

BAGHDAD, IRAQ

THE MOMENT ONE lands at Baghdad Airport, all the political arguments, all the philosophical certainties, all the things that Iraq has come to represent in the American imagination simply melt away. What's left is a place—a not very nice place. From the backseat of a beat-up sedan steered by a gun-toting Iraqi driver, the streets of Baghdad look no different than they did during my last trip here six months ago—except for the large number of Iraqi police, who seem to be everywhere. The smell of burning trash is ubiquitous, as is the sound of gunfire. Sheep wander down one street; a billboard-size wanted ad for Abu Musab Al Zarqawi hangs above another. A line of cars waiting for gasoline snakes around the block. Pairs of Blackhawk helicopters and Apache gunships roar overhead (one flying alone usually means bad news—a medevac or some other emergency). The war goes on.

If Iraq the place has for some time now borne scant resemblance to Iraq the abstraction, the distance only became greater with President Bush's inaugural address. The president spoke not only of supporting democracy, but of "support[ing] the growth of democratic movements and institu-

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tions." To the world's "democratic reformers," Bush pledged, "America sees you for who you are: the future leaders of your free country." But in Iraq, the very centerpiece of the U.S. campaign to export democracy, "democratic movements and institutions" are dying, the result of illiberalism, U.S. neglect, and, above all, sheer physical insecurity. As it grinds into its third year, the war for a liberal Iraq is destroying the dream of a liberal Iraq.

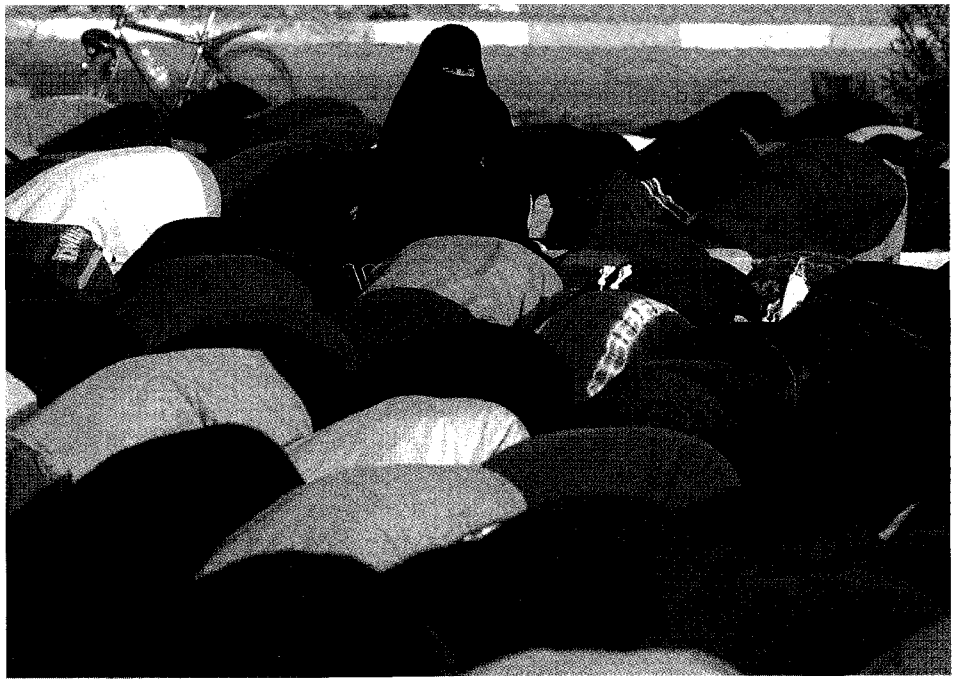
If liberal democracy—that is, a political system that protects basic rights and freedoms—is a political choice, an act of will, then someone must create and sustain it. In Iraq, however, those someones—Iraqi liberals—have been so thoroughly marginalized that Sunday's elections, which should be the crowning achievement of Iraqi liberalism, may instead signal its end. As well as empowering religious conservatives, the elections will showcase a cartoon version of democracy, a process of choosing leaders and not much more. The *liberal* component of liberal democracy—to the extent that it ever took hold in Iraq—has all but evaporated. Its dissipation can be measured in opinion polls, which show dramatic declines in support for a secular state and civil liberties, as well as in the weakness of Iraq's civil society and the strength of its sectarian attachments. It can be measured in the popularity of illiberal political parties. It can even be measured in the meager sums Washington has allotted Iraqi nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and liberal activists. Most of all, it can be measured by the number of prominent Iraqi liberals—NGO leaders, secular politicians, progressive clerics, newspaper editors—who have taken refuge behind barbed-wire gates, fled the country, gone broke, or been murdered. In a country with no liberal past to draw from, where ethnic and religious identities are hardening and daily suicide-bombs and beheadings are ripping apart the thin layer of national cohesion that remains, this hardly comes as a surprise. But for anyone who hoped to see a model democracy take root in the Arab world, it comes as a profound disappointment.

IRAQ'S LIBERALS—MANY of them former exiles—make up a small community, some of its members brave and selfless, some so far removed from everyday Iraqis that they refer to their countrymen as "them." A liberal close to Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, whom I will call Mujahed (he asked that I not use his real name for security reasons), agrees to meet in the lobby of the Green Zone's vast convention center. The very notion of a convention center in the midst of a war zone says something about the U.S. enterprise here—aspiring to normalcy when everything is coming apart at the seams. (Waiting one day to meet an American friend, I watch as a nattily dressed Ahmed Chalabi makes his way through the lobby, young Iraqi-Americans greeting him at every step. His transformation from a Western secularist to a champion of radical Shia cleric Moqtada Al Sadr is itself evidence of liberalism's diminished appeal.)

Mujahed meets me at the café on the second floor. I have been told he's a rising star, an adviser in the prime minister's office who has just landed a plum ministry post. And, apparently, he is—one after the other, well-wishers approach to greet him. Putting away his two cell phones, Mujahed, who left Iraq as a teen and lived for years in the United States, lays out the case for optimism. "Iraq is a secular state," he says. "It will always be a secular state." Liberals, he insists, not clerics, command the silent majority in Iraq. Iraqis, he adds, don't want religion in politics. "They want to put religion aside." At which point his cell phones begin to ring.

Alas, the distance separating Mujahed and his contemporaries from the average Iraqi defies measurement. One can see it even in the shiny convention center, where, invisible to the elites and soldiers around them, sullen-looking Iraqi workers mop the floor. Out in the streets of Baghdad, dust-covered men wearing soiled *jalabiyas*, many carrying tools or pushing carts, trudge up and down the boulevards. Trash piles up along the curbs; teenagers wander about aim-

Many of the candidates endorsed by Iraq's senior-most Shia cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali Al Sistani, support illiberal policies, such as forcing women to wear the veil.



ALI ABBAS/EPA/NEWSCOM

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lessly; minaret speakers broadcast competing messages. "The liberal exiles are so far away from natural Iraqis," a cabinet adviser tells me over bread and soda at a Baghdad coffee shop. "They have chosen a lonely path."

Perhaps. But they're also burdened by the fact that, in a country with no liberal tradition, liberalism itself is a foreign concept. The peculiarities of Arab culture, decades of life under Saddam Hussein, ethnic and religious rivalries—all have been offered by way of explaining why it is that, as State Department Iraq expert Alina Romanowski has put it, "Iraq presents as unpromising a breeding ground for democracy as any in the world." Among the fed up—a not-insignificant contingent of Westerners here—one hears echoes of the famous complaint lodged over a half-century ago by John Bagot Glubb, the British commander of Jordan's Arab Legion, who groused, "We have given them self-government for which they are totally unsuited. They veer naturally toward dictatorship. Democratic institutions are promptly twisted into engines of intrigue." A more sensible version of the argument may be found in the 2002 U.N. Development Programme Arab Human Development Report, which described traditional Arab culture as being at odds with modernization, and noted the persistence in every Arab state of "a powerful executive branch that exerts significant control over all other branches of the state, being in some cases free from institutional checks and balances." Even today, that legacy casts a long shadow in Iraq, where official corruption runs rampant, Allawi governs more or less unchecked, and endless layers of bureaucracy weigh down the government. "After years of dictatorship," the adviser remarks, "Iraqis can only define the meaning of 'democracy' in a dictionary."

THIS PRESENTS A real problem for Iraq's liberals. The advantages of democracy, after all, routinely get lost in societies divided along ethnic and religious lines, and, in Iraq, these allegiances are rapidly crowding out all others. As a result, the very things that make for shifting majorities in liberal democracies—civic concerns, economic calculations, political preferences—have increasingly taken a backseat to the latest edict from the local mosque. The most important such edict, issued by the country's senior-most Shia cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali Al Sistani, urges Shia to vote next week for the United Iraqi Alliance slate of candidates, headed up by Abdul Aziz Al Hakim, a conservative cleric with close ties to Iran. The signature proposals of many candidates on the Sistani list span the entire spectrum of illiberalism, from rolling back women's rights to stipulating in the constitution that Iraq be an Islamic state.

One of the candidates on the list, Mowaffaq Al Rubaie, works out of an office in the headquarters of the Iraqi Interim Government—the IIG building, as the American soldiers who patrol the area call it. The building offers a tempting target for the insurgents and, to get to it, one must navigate layer upon layer of security guards. That Rubaie works here at all seems odd, since his place on the Sistani list and his insistence on an Islamic government in Iraq have earned him the ire of Iraqis in the U.S. orbit. It has also caused him problems in Allawi's interim government, in which he holds the title of national security adviser but has fallen out of favor with the prime minister's office.

An activist for 30 years in the Islamic Dawa Party and a former exile in Iran, Rubaie nonetheless hardly fits the American image of a theocrat. The way he describes the agenda of the Sistani list makes it sounds like an offshoot of Germany's Christian Democrats. "We want a democratic system implemented by people with moral values," he explains. "If they are devout, practicing Muslims, they can be held accountable." Islam, after all, is the "ideological, cultural, and educational background of Iraq." By contrast, he notes, "secularism, translated into Arabic, is a hated word."

Like the constituency he represents, Rubaie has a complicated relationship with the Americans. He has said, publicly, that U.S. forces should stay in Iraq. Yet he seems uneasy with the occupation, with the "cruelty to Iraqis" that he says he too often sees on display. I ask him if his ambivalence stems from an incident an Iraqi friend described to me. Last year, as Rubaie was leaving the IIG building, American soldiers at a checkpoint demanded his identification badge. Apparently Rubaie was carrying the wrong color badge and, after a tussle with the soldiers, the national security adviser wound up in the dirt, with a squad of nervous GIs shouting obscenities at him, their guns pointed at his head. "I have never felt closer to death," Rubaie says, "even in Saddam's death chambers."

Rubaie's is the reasoned voice of an electoral slate that boasts 25 candidates from the Iran-backed Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), 20 from Dawa, and 14 from Moqtada Al Sadr's camp. It may not be the "Iranian list," as Iraqi Defense Minister Hazem Shaalan has labeled it. But it's certainly not the American list, either. Rather, it's the logical consequence of representative democracy in a brittle, hollowed-out state where tribe and religion remain the basic affiliations. "It is fair to say," a team of democracy experts visiting Iraq last year concluded, "that the two largest parties, Dawa and the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, do not at present share a fundamental commitment to the kind of political system that would be defined as 'democratic' in the West." Yet they certainly support democracy's electoral math. "As Shiites, we are a majority, so democracy suits us very well," the Sistani list's Adil Abdul Mahdi said earlier this month. This is a truth that has penetrated even Shia strongholds like Sadr City, which, according to Army officers, has now become one of the safest neighborhoods in Baghdad, its residents having realized the new government will be theirs.

THAT THE SISTANI list stands poised to capture a large plurality of next week's vote is, at least to hear many Iraqi liberals tell it, largely the fault of the Americans, for whom the material from

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which liberal democracy is traditionally constructed—the rule of law, civil society, the protection of basic liberties—has become an afterthought. No one embodies the dashed hopes of pro-U.S. Iraqis more than Mustafa Al Kadhimiy, a kind and intelligent man in his late thirties who stands at the center of Iraq's tiny liberal network. When not pressing the American authorities here to support liberal Iraqi NGOs, activists, and media outlets, Kadhimiy writes newspaper columns and works as the director of the Iraq Memory Foundation's oral history project, interviewing Saddam's victims. Kadhimiy spends nearly all of his time in his office, where a light in the basement reveals thousands of files stacked to the ceiling. Each contains a truth many Iraqis would just as soon forget—execution orders, accounts of interrogations, evaluations of the trustworthiness of secondary school students.

In 2003, the Bush administration requested $1 million from Congress to fund the Memory Foundation. The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), however, never passed the funds along. Nearly every liberal foundation in Iraq has a similar tale of bureaucratic woe. "We believe America is coming here to promote liberalism," says Kadhimiy, ticking off a litany of examples where it seems to have done exactly the reverse—shutting down Iraq's popular liberal newspaper, *Sumer*; ignoring the country's most liberal cleric and outspoken proponent of secular governance, Ayad Jamal Al Din; and failing to support liberal NGOs and political candidates. "Liberals and independents need outside help—the Islamic parties have millions of dollars from Iran—but the Americans do not help the liberals at all." Nonetheless, Kadhimiy continues to document Saddam's depredations, watched at every turn by insurgents. "They come to my family to say that 'we will kill [Mustafa],'" he says of himself. "But we cannot afford a guard."

The charge of U.S. indifference—a staple among Iraqi liberals—has merit. But what many Iraqis see as evidence of U.S. callousness amounts, in truth, to bureaucratic ineptitude. Organizations like the National Democratic Institute, the International Republican Institute (IRI), and the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) have provided invaluable support to local NGOs, such as the Iraqi Society for Human Rights Coordination, the Baghdad Women Association, and dozens of other groups. But the U.S. Agency for International Development's signature $43 million program to support civil society has been tied up in bureaucratic knots for a year. Moreover, the funds that the United States does channel to civil society organizations frequently drip out in increments of a few hundred dollars or less, because, as one American involved in the effort puts it, "the Iraqis don't know how to spend the money." The U.S. Embassy employs exactly one staffer, and no high-level officials, to support Iraqi civil society. "I was at CPA handling civil society support for the Baghdad region," recalls A. Heather Coyne, who directs USIP programs here, "and we had virtually nothing to offer the emerging organizations in terms of resources or expertise."

This indifference has not helped liberals' chances in the elections, which the CPA set up as a nationwide vote for candidate slates, rather than as a separate contests in individual districts. This arrangement favors national Shia parties at the expense of lesser-known candidates, such as Al Din and Ghassan Al Atiyah, many of them liberals with no constituency outside their respective provinces. (Imagine, for instance, how the Upper West Side's Ronnie Eldridge or Washington, D.C.'s Carol Schwartz would fare in a national election in the United States.) And, while Teheran has funded the major Shia parties to the tune of $20 million, Washington has refused to play favorites, insisting instead on a strict policy of "evenhandedness." This may seem like evidence of high-mindedness. But the United States boasts a long history of favoring pro-U.S. political organizations abroad. The decision to do otherwise here reflects a broader logic of the U.S. mission: Democracy first; liberalism later.

BUT EVEN AN Iraq blessed with the political culture of Sweden would find it impossible to cultivate liberalism in this blood-soaked landscape. War and liberalism, as even U.S. history attests, do not co-exist easily. To demonstrate the point, an Iraqi friend drops me off one night at the house of Mashal Sarraf, Iraq's deputy defense minister. Rows of bodyguards in black ski masks line the driveway, barely discernible in the dark. An Iraqi in civilian clothes pulls me into an SUV and deposits me in front of Sarraf's front door. Another escorts me into his living room, where Sarraf sits on a plush sofa, a cigarette in one hand, worry beads in the other, a five-foot television screen in front of him. He is a prisoner.

Not coincidentally, he is also one of Iraq's most famous liberal voices. Having left Iraq as a young man for exile in Beirut and London, Sarraf returned after the U.S. invasion with the same hopes that animated so many other liberal exiles. But that was two years ago. From the vantage point of his post in the defense ministry, war has made liberalism impossible. "We have to admit the terrorists have won," he says. "People cannot engage in civil society; the war has stopped progress; liberalism is over for now." Asked what, if anything, can be done to revive the liberal project, Sarraf replies, "We need an emergency government that does nothing but security. When there is stability, then liberalism will begin to emerge, but only when there is stability." A line of visitors parades through the living room, for Sarraf, too, cannot emerge. So I do, leaving him at the door.

After a while, one grows accustomed to leaving liberals at the door. Which raises a basic question: How can there be liberalism in a country where liberals cannot leave their homes? Every week brings a new tally—earning nary a mention in the U.S. press—of election workers and NGO staffers murdered in the streets of Mosul and Baghdad. "I can't mention where I work," says an Iraqi woman active in a human rights organization. "I tell people I work in [a neighborhood in Western Baghdad], because my neigh-

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bor could betray me and have me killed. Getting to work is death."

Many continue to brave the odds just the same, having decided that their cause merits the risk. "The Iraqis amaze me by continuing to step up to the plate," Coyne says, "even though the people at the plate are increasingly likely to get picked off." But there simply isn't enough political space for them to operate effectively. The war has sucked the oxygen out of the liberal experiment. Iraqi opinion polls, for instance, which showed majorities favoring a secular state a year ago, show the reverse today—a poll by IRI released last August reported that 70 percent of Iraqis would prefer an Islamic state. Only stability can arrest these trends. As former CPA adviser and democracy expert Larry Diamond has put it, "You can't have a democratic state unless you have a state, and the fundamental, irreducible condition of a state is that it has a monopoly on the means of violence." Needless to say, in Iraq today, no one possesses such a monopoly.

So I set off to accompany the one force that possesses the closest thing to it. When it comes to liberalism in Iraq, there's no getting around a simple truth: NGOs do what they can; Iraqi liberals do what they can; but, in the end, only the U.S. military has the ability to create stability—and, hence, democracy—here. Most Iraqis are uncomfortable with that. Even pro-U.S. Iraqi elites have come to resent pulling over their cars as U.S. convoys rumble by, having .50-caliber machine guns trained at their windshields, and navigating endless U.S. checkpoints and enduring petty humiliations there. As for less privileged Iraqis, it has become a truism of everyday life in Baghdad that they stand a greater chance of being gunned down by nervous U.S. troops, reeling from an ambush or an improvised explosive device, than of being blown up by a suicide bomber. My Iraqi driver, for one, has no problem idling in bumper-to-bumper traffic (though I do). But, when an American patrol speeds by, he nearly swerves off the road.

Going out on Army patrols, then, feels like passing through a looking glass. Crisscrossing western Baghdad with a convoy made up of elements of the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment and the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, the Iraqis staring back at us seem far away. The sensation doesn't last. The convoy lurches to a halt at a street corner in Mansur. Apart from the soldiers mounting the machine guns atop the Humvees, the troops all dismount—and start handing out pro-government newspapers. Perhaps because the handout is, literally, an exercise in gunpoint democracy, *Iraq Now* has few takers, and we make our way back to the American base. As we zip past gas station lines and through traffic circles—Iraqi cars in front of us scattering to make way—an Army specialist riding in the front seat says, "Ninety percent of them are glad we're here. They know their freedom depends on us."

The belief runs all the way up the chain of command, along with a faith in Iraqi democracy that even the most optimistic of Iraq's liberals can't match. At Camp Victory, the sprawling Army base on the outskirts of Baghdad that the 1st Infantry Division and various units attached to it call home, I sit down for lunch in the book-lined office of Colonel Mark A. Milley, the 2nd Brigade's commander. "The enemy," Milley tells me, "is akin to nineteenth-century nihilists—they offer no alternative vision of society, they're only trying to destroy." And us? "As is true in any insurgency," Milley continues, "the people who will succeed have to appeal to large segments of the population. We and the government of Iraq offer a policy of hope." He recounts the story of an Iraqi cleric who told him, "What you are doing has God's blessing." At which point one of Milley's officers opens the door. The 2nd Brigade has been mortared, and five of Milley's soldiers have been wounded, one seriously. Over the past month alone, seven have died.

The losses don't seem to have budged members of the brigade from their faith in the U.S. mission. "Iraqis are starting to see that things are getting better," Major Web Wright tells me. "They can see that we're offering them a future." Dusk arrives, and I wander around the base with a young Army journalist. Miles and miles of trailers stretch into the distance, flanked by forests of antennae and swirls of dust, kicked up by armored vehicles going out on patrols and choppers landing and taking off. In the huge mess hall, Indian servers offer ice cream, cheeseburgers, even an Indian buffet. And then I stumble back into Iraq. Searching for a night patrol to hitch a ride with, I wander into the darkened courtyard of a battalion headquarters. There, facing a concrete blast wall, sit a row of what appear at first glance to be soldiers back from a patrol, huddling in blankets. But they are all wearing blindfolds, and an Iraqi man shouts at them in Arabic. The detainees, it turns out, were captured in an auto-body shop—often used as bomb-making factories—and tested positive for explosive residue on their hands.

Finally, at about midnight, I depart Camp Victory with a patrol of armored personnel carriers (APCs) belonging to the 3rd Platoon, 58th Combat Engineer Company. As soon as the APCs start to move, its 20- and 21-year-old passengers begin trading coordinates on their radios, scanning darkened buildings with spotlights, and swiveling their gun turrets toward potential ambush sites. The platoon's interpreter, a Sudanese man who somehow wound up in Iraq a decade ago, shouts to me above the din of the tracks rumbling beneath us, "I want to go back to Africa."

I join the lieutenant standing in the open hatch. "The more educated Iraqis are, the more grateful they are to us," he says. "It's the less educated ones—they're the ones who throw rocks." Ahead of us, the line of APCs makes it way forward, only their headlights visible through the dust and darkness. I wonder whether I should offer my opinion that it is the less educated Iraqis who will decide the country's fate. I wonder whether I should tell him that he may soon be fighting on behalf of a government that includes the very forces his comrades battled in Najaf and Sadr City. I wonder what exactly it is that the United States has asked him to fight for. ■

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

The Great Divide

A LETTER FROM A READER in the Pacific Northwest asks wryly: "Do you invent some of the films you write about?" The question prompted a Borgesian temptation to invent, but I was soon calmed down by a sober fact—hardly new, still sobering. The reader's faintly desolate question underscored it. In terms of filmgoing possibilities, this country is schizoid. I, in New York, confront a fairly full range of available films. Only in a few large cities is anything like that range available; and those cities are only a small slice of this country's possible audience. Most people, like that reader, have the chance to see only the major Hollywood products—not even all the American films, let alone foreign ones.

NEVER COMING TO A THEATER NEAR YOU
By Kenneth Turan
(Public Affairs)

LOST EMBRACE
(New Yorker)

This dismal fact ought not to make us romanticize. If Kiarostami and Tavernier and Zhang Yimou were as widely available as *The Lord of the Rings*, they would not attract a sliver of the same attendance, which is obviously why they don't have the same distribution. But doesn't that sliver deserve nourishment? The possible nourishment exists. Year after year films are being made for more people than have the chance to see them. And if the whole idea of film-making is as serious as some of us take it to be, this gap between film and viewers is a cultural crime.

Aptly, a recent book by Kenneth Turan, film critic of the *Los Angeles Times* and National Public Radio, is titled *Never Coming to a Theater Near You: A Celebration of a Certain Kind of Movie*, a collection of his reviews of films that have not been widely shown. He says that in his twelve-year experience

> I've noticed an increasing disconnect between the films I recommend person-to-person because they've meant the most to me and the ones most people have managed to see. The pressures to experience the blockbusters of the moment are too great and the time that smaller films remain on screens is so finite (the good really do die young in this business).... In theory, the wide reach of videos and DVDs makes it possible for viewers to catch up on the films they've missed, but in practical terms ... most people blank out on the names of features they've been meaning to see and reach for whatever's handiest.

His book is meant as a reminder list.

Naturally Turan's list is not precisely what mine would be. I would have included *Thirteen Conversations About One Thing* by Jill Sprecher and *The Designated Mourner* by David Hare, to name just two overlooked gems. But the disparity between what is available to only a few and what reaches the many is more than a game of matching one critic's favorites against another's. Nor will it suffice to fix the blame on the money concerns of theater owners. Of course those money concerns are stringent. (Orson Welles once said that anyone who talks about films and doesn't mention money is a jackass.) Theater owners are not philanthropists, and their refusal to book most of the films that I'm aching about is perfectly reasonable. The real trouble, the basic problem, is deeper.

Harold Rosenberg, who in his time did a good deal of lecturing around the country, once described the cultural situation in America, apart from the biggest cities, as a wilderness dotted with stockades. Those stockades were mostly the lively colleges and universities. In my own lecturing days, I found Rosenberg's comment a shade too reductive but healthily blunt. Radio and television and paperbound books and, latterly, the Internet were all regarded for a time as chances for cultural spread. Little proof of this is so far forthcoming. The reverse could easily be argued: that these increments have chiefly given more power to those who have no interest in, say, Jill Sprecher.

For me, a chilling sign of the gravity of this cultural situation comes from the recent presidential election. Political experts tell us that Bush got his majority from what is called the heartland, that the two coasts were more favorable to Kerry. As one who still gapes at the reelection on moral values of a man who led us into a war because of mass-destructive weapons that do not exist, I can't help feeling that at the root of the political thud is a blankness that culture could lighten. The factual ignorance—40 percent of the electorate still believe that the weapons are there—would be less likely in a public of greater sophistication. This is hardly to say that Hare and Sprecher and their kin could have got Kerry elected; but it is certainly to say that those films and hundreds more at their level of ambition might have sharpened some people, made them less ready to accept like hungry puppies whatever was fed them. For decades many of us have been hoping that the stockades would have more of a radiating effect on the territory around them. We're still hoping.

Why, then, do critics—at least on some magazines and newspapers—continue to review films that will probably not reach wide audiences? For myself, it is partly because, as a democrat, I believe that the rights of the minority must be respected, including the filmgoing minority. It would be an offense to that minority, whether or not they knew it, to omit reviews, positive or otherwise, of films that are part of contemporary culture and of value to their cultural conspectus. (And we can hope that critics of the Turan bent may stimulate a demand to which theaters can afford to respond.) Equally importantly, it would be an of-

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fense to the art of film to ignore those who, often through much travail, keep reaching upward. I don't think that seriously intended films will save this sorry world, but I do think that their absence, even ignorance that they exist, would make it sorrier.

Here is an instance. **Lost Embrace** will not reach a lot of theaters, but at least the readers of a magazine like this one might want to know that it exists. The director Daniel Burman is a young Argentinean Jew who is much taken with questions of identity and possibility. He treats here some Jews and others who run shops in a Buenos Aires mall, and he centers particularly on the quandaries of Ariel, Jewish, who is in his twenties. His parents were Polish-born. His father went off to Israel to fight in the Yom Kippur War and never returned. Ariel is self-possessed, intelligent, affectionate but solitary, a dissatisfied young man who loves his mother but doesn't want to spend his life clerking in her little lingerie shop. A passion has been growing in him to "return" to Poland (where he has never been). Involvements with others, including women, and the sudden re-appearance of his father complicate his intents.

Burman, who co-wrote the screenplay with Marcelo Birmajer, is deft at character portraits. The assorted members of the shopping-mall community are sketched affectionately, knowingly. The sentimental snares in the story are skirted through Burman's freewheeling style. Much of the camera work is handheld, much of it is in close-up, much of it is of people in motion, and sometimes Burman uses whip-pans from one face to another instead of editing. The overall effect is of a young director treating some old problems with the cinematic lexicon of his time. So he is able to create warmth without slush.

Widespread viewing of *Lost Embrace* would not exalt the United States of America. But people attuned to it, and to the hundreds of comparably sophisticated films, might help to raise the national pitch of sensibility. ■

Lee Siegel on Television

Terror and Television

THE SPEED AT WHICH POPULAR culture now dramatizes actual events is extraordinary. I'm not sure whether a movie was made about Kennedy's assassination not long after the event, but it was decades before a film appeared that portrayed Kennedy's murder with real provocative detachment, Oliver Stone's tendentious *JFK*. Two years later Hollywood finally applied itself big-time to the Holocaust with *Schindler's List*. There were previous Holocaust films, obviously; but Hollywood gigantism in the treatment of the subject had to await Steven Spielberg. His expertly done movie was thoroughly formulaic, and thoroughly, if understandably, reverential before its subject; and yet it was so unthinkingly arrogant at moments—Spielberg took his imperial camera all the way into the showers themselves—that it could only have been made after nearly two post-Holocaust generations had come and gone.

THE HAMBURG CELL
(HBO)

DIRTY WAR
(HBO)

Indeed, the commercial representation, on the big or small screen, of the Holocaust—of any unspeakable historical tragedy—entails a paradoxical requirement with regard to its intended audience. For the sake of financial success, the film must not primarily address itself to the people who have survived the real historical catastrophe that the film is attempting to depict. Few of them would accept the reflection of their experience through commerce-warped formulas. *Hotel Rwanda* is an American product, not a Rwandan one, made primarily for American audiences. *Schindler's List* was not made for the Jews who had survived the death camps, and *The Killing Fields* was not made for the Cambodians who had lived through the genocide organized by the Khmer Rouge, and the several films about the genocide in Bosnia—*Welcome to Sarajevo*, *Harrison's Flowers*, *Behind Enemy Lines*—did not have in mind an audience of Bosnians. Whatever their emotional or intellectual strengths, those movies could not be profitable unless they hewed to certain movie conventions that refine horror into bearable, even comfortable sadness, and unless they end on some kind of improving, affirmative note.

In doing so, however, they end up harrowing the memories of the people who were there, and violating the reality of the people who have been violated. *The Killing Fields* was about a brave American journalist who returned home alive to tell the world his horrible tale. A Cambodian film about the genocide would not finish like that, nor would a Bosnian film or a Rwandan film conclude with the image of a foreigner who survived, who will go on with his life. No matter how sensitively done they are, no matter how committed to truth and justice, the only justification of these movies that appear while their subjects—the ones who survived or escaped—are still living is that they are made for people who had no connection to the historical tragedies that they portray. This is because such movies are entertainments—deepish entertainments. They are sermons by strangers.

Three years after September 11, 2001, the representations of that day and its consequences in the new world that we now inhabit are starting to appear, and as movies they raise interesting questions. Unlike *Hotel Rwanda* and the rest, they are not about historical tragedies that have taken hundreds of thousands or millions of lives, and whose survivors are still living, in many cases their agony fresh in their minds. The September 11 films do not, therefore, fall helplessly into that unwitting erasure of experience, into that marginalization of the dead and the near-dead of the other movies. On the contrary, the audience they want to reach is made up of potential victims and survivors, people whose very lives depend upon the outcome of the circumstances that the movies depict—in a word, us. And we have too much of a stake in the subject to be merely entertained. Yet can such movies be anything more than entertainments when they have to follow the formulas and conventions of any movie produced for a mass audience? And what kind of entertainments can they decently be?

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TWO FILMS THAT PREMIERED ON HBO in January deal with the attacks of September 11 and the radically new situation left in their wake, and they seem like impossible undertakings, each one beset by its special impossibility. **THE HAMBURG CELL**, based on "known facts and actual events," as the movie tells us, portrays the hijackers and their accomplices in the years and months leading up to September 11. **DIRTY WAR**, on the other hand, is wholly fictional, though also a fact-based scenario of what might happen if a so-called dirty bomb—low-grade radioactive material dispersed by an explosive—went off in the middle of a workday in the center of London.

One way these movies might have eluded the compromising neutrality of entertainments would have been for their makers to take a crude ideological turn. Such crudeness might have been, at least, a saving authenticity. *The Hamburg Cell*, in particular, must have been vulnerable to that temptation. It could have denied the Al Qaeda members human dimensions and portrayed them as cardboard villains, the way the Germans and the Japanese were depicted in American and British films during World War II. Yet the Final Solution, and the Nazis' treatment of their conquered populations, and the Japanese atrocities in Manchuria, made the one-dimensional representation of German and Japanese soldiers an ironically full disclosure of their humanity. Crude and flat was what the killers had become as people. (This didn't mean that fuller, more empathetic portraits were not possible; but they started to appear once the conflict with Germany and Japan had settled back beyond the horizon, into history.) And we were at war, a concrete war with known enemies, whose intentions and capabilities were also known.

Or *The Hamburg Cell* could have shown the hijackers as tortured and misguided, manipulated by their environment and by Western exploitation and neglect; and it could have represented their Western targets as being driven by all the corruption and the evil that the West attributes to Islamic militants. The Germans and the Japanese were sometimes depicted in this way long after World War II in American films such as *The Young Lions*, which were sentimental attempts at expanding common human sympathies that the war had contracted. In the current context, such moral equivalences would be the sharpest kind of anti-war propaganda. But *The Hamburg Cell* is neither anti-war nor pro-war. Its attempt at ethical sobriety and narrative poise is proof of the absolute strangeness and tension of this moment in history.

We are at war; and yet you can hardly imagine a movie during World War II depicting a German soldier as anything but one-dimensionally evil. It is proof of the profound ambivalence attending our current conflict that *The Hamburg Cell*—a mostly British production, bought by HBO, an American company—presents the hijackers and their cohorts in a full human light. It is certainly proof of the opaque, somewhat confused nature of the war against terrorism. At the same time—and this is sort of remarkable—the film's terrorists are fully, and humanly, despicable. They are human, but they are monsters. And the cause they slaughter for, their immensely destructive and self-destructive jihad, is depicted with a steady, penetrating, analytical eye as a fundamental—and fundamentalist—deformation of humanity.

In a sense, *The Hamburg Cell* has something of the calm balance of the better World War II films made many years after the war, in which Nazism is not presented as a supernatural force, or as an evil latent in human nature, but as a very particular evil rooted in particular individuals. Watching this film, you realize that what is unique about the war against terrorism is that the terrorists' campaign against the United States consists, in the public mind, of a single assault. The attacks on September 11 have been so often memorialized and commemorated that their singularity has been hallowed; they are often made to seem like flukes of history rather than, as we are constantly being warned—or assured—the first tragedy in a long onslaught against us.

And so there exists alongside all the calls for a resolved and relentless war against the jihadists a popular feeling that the wrenching emotional loss of war is over. Nothing we hear now about the fight against the insurgents in Iraq rises to the moral clarity that seemed to be produced by the events on September 11. This is why we will see more and more non-ideological artistic representations of September 11 and its aftermath, such as *The Hamburg Cell*. Though not committed to a political position, these works will probably infuriate people who believe that the war against terrorism is America's most urgent task. Certainly, both movies refuse to endorse the idea of an endless, permanent offensive against an all-pervasive enemy, and so you could say that they represent a skeptical position with regard to the war. But they are also so clear about the malevolence and the fanaticism that drive the Islamic militants, and about what calamities such emotions might lead to, that they will also disappoint anyone hoping for an anti-war statement.

THE MOST PECULIAR QUALITY of these movies about a war-like situation is that they have the detachment of peaceful times. *Dirty War*, a simple, literal, strenuously researched scenario of disaster, seems like the chronicle of a horrific event rather than the prediction of one. Its strongest note is ruefulness. It begins with a drill involving firefighters rushing to save lives in the wake of a dirty bomb attack, and then tells the parallel stories of the terrorists' organization of such an assault, the explosion itself, and the attempts to deal with the aftermath while catching the terrorists, who are still at large and planning more attacks. Yet the movie is profoundly low-keyed, and sparing in its central human dramas, among them the poignant portrayal of a fire-department officer and his wife. Its thrust is a documentary-like conscientiousness about the facts, as if it were not a drama at all, but a clarifying supplement to confused, panic-inciting news reports. *Dirty War* is so intent on depicting techniques of bioterror containment and control, so detailed in its enactment of the terrorists' apprehension or destruction, that it has the soothing effect of making you feel that the worst is over. PBS's rebroadcast of the film scheduled for late February, accompanied by a panel of experts on bioterrorism, will doubtlessly reinforce the feeling that *Dirty War* represented a real event, now safely past. Given the hysteria that the Bush administration likes to provoke with its politically timed terror alerts, all this reassurance is hardly a complacency. It is something of a public service.

The term "therapeutic," as applied to any organized experience that is not actually therapy, immediately makes that experience suspect. With regard to a work of art, whether popular or serious, "therapeutic" falls upon it like a doom. But television has always straddled the boundary between popular art and thera-

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peutic consolation. You watch it at home, in your familiar, intimate surroundings; maybe you are not even fully dressed; maybe you are not dressed at all. You could be eating dinner, or relieving yourself, or getting drunk. Until the advent of television, there never was a mass medium for entertainment or information that had such intimacy.

It became inevitable that television would address life's mundane problems because television itself is so mundane, part of the ordinary flow of time the way those problems are. Television has to reflect back to you your own sense of security. It also has to mirror your sense of your own decency and your own limitations. It can't leave you ready for bed with your adrenaline racing, or your thirst for justice unslaked. You cannot be unsettled, shattered, in your own home. Perhaps, very slowly, DVDs—not to mention HBO's raw pioneering dramas—are changing all of that, and creating a new type of nervous system that goes to bed excited and wakes up agitated. For the most part, however, television is a patronizing narcotic, and for all the junk a most respectful medium.

The terrorist threat is so cloudy, faceless, and vague, so manipulable by political purposes, so definitely present but indefinitely manifested, that it sometimes feels interchangeable with everyday dread itself. In other words, the terrorist threat operates on the most intimate level imaginable. The aspect of it that makes the mind complicit with unseen dangers is what makes it so hard to prove, so hard to refute, and so serviceable to so many interests. Its battlefield is, in fact, our familiar surroundings.

The attacks on September 11, after all, destroyed people in their safe, habitual, everyday environments—the heartbreakingly ordinary office papers that floated above Manhattan for days afterward were like an image of terror's apparently enveloping presence and intimate battleground. What better medium, then, exists for the clarification of terror, and for the consolation about terror, than television? Tom Clancy's irresponsible and demented *The Sum of All Fears*, in which a nuclear device is exploded on American soil—not a dirty bomb, a nuclear bomb, which is extremely unlikely—could not have been made for television. The movie would have violated and then burst its medium.

For the Man Who Taught Tricks to Owls

You say they were slow to learn. The brains of owls
Went down in your opinion through long hours
Of unresponsive staring
While you showed them how to act out minor parts
In the world of Harry Potter. Come with me now
Into the night, perch motionless, balanced
On a branch above a thicket, where every choice
Of a flight path is more narrow
Than your broad wing-span, more jagged
And crooked than patterns of interrupted moonlight
On twigs and fallen leaves, where what you take
In silence with claws and beak to stay alive
Knows everything about you except your tricks,
Except where you're going to be in the next instant
And how you got there without anyone's help.

DAVID WAGONER

[redacted]

At the heart of both *The Hamburg Cell* and, to a much lesser extent, *Dirty War* is the relationship between two people, a man and a woman. This time-tested Hollywood convention of reducing every type of conflict, even actual historical conflict, to a romantic relationship is often the worst kind of cop-out. (It would make more sense to reduce romantic relationships to historical conflicts.) But given the intimate nature of the terrorist threat, the decision of *The Hamburg Cell*'s creators to center their true story on the courtship and marriage of Ziad Jarrar, the Lebanese dental student who hijacked one of the planes headed for Washington, to Aysel, a Muslim Turkish student he met while studying in Germany, makes sense. It puts a human face on all the talk of the war on terrorism, which sometimes rises to the level of the supernatural, or occult, or begins to echo dialectical materialism's absolute certainty of final, resolving, historical conflict.

The Hamburg Cell begins and ends with Ziad standing in the terminal of Newark Airport, where he is about to board his final flight in this life. We see him on a pay phone talking with Aysel, his wife, to whom he has lied for month after month, promising her that he will cut off the murderous nutcases who are sinking into hell with him, that they will have a quiet, peaceful life, with children, in a good place, in a nice house. His almost astonishing deceitfulness runs parallel, throughout the movie, to his gradual transformation into a suicide-killer, and to his fellow jihadists' evolving plans for their attacks on the United States. He stands with the phone to his ear, refusing to answer Aysel's nervous questions about where he is and what he is doing—she has no idea—responding to her only by repeating, over and over again, the words "I love you."

For the entire movie, as Ziad has become twisted into a murderer, his sole response to Aysel's recriminations and desperate pleas has been this simple timeless phrase. "I love you." What he really means is "I hate you." But he has so completely identified his ideals with his motives, and his motives with the reality outside him, that his feeling about another human being thoroughly absorbs that person's reality. He is too vain to nakedly hate Aysel. He has to flatter his ego by "loving" her as he is destroying her. "Do not cause the discomfort of those you are killing," one of the hijackers' handlers commands them, with outrageously self-deluded sanctimony, as he quickly teaches them some incapacitating martial-arts techniques in a hotel room a few hours before the attacks. In *Dirty War*, the chief terrorist savors his own virtue by giving his wife detailed instructions for the care, after his death, of their son.

I have no idea whether Ziad's conversation at the airport is what actually transpired, or whether it is one of this movie's modest embellishments. But it has the perfect effect. War-against-terrorism purists might fear the soft-seeming quality of such stuff. To my mind, though, it does the right kind of work. It gives evil the demystified face of (as Americans like to say) an asshole. It gives a comprehensible correlative to the self-deceit that fanaticism cultivates and thrives on. And it implies that just as "love" can be a war cry, and a free pass, to the indulgence of some deep-hidden enmity, so evil can be—perhaps is, in its essence—the putrid excess of self-conscious and self-justifying goodness. ■

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Frank Kermode
Midnight Oil

V. S. PRITCHETT:
A WORKING LIFE
By Jeremy Treglown
(Random House, 334 pp., $25.95)

VICTOR SAWDON PRITCHETT was born in 1900 and died in 1997. His writing life occupied about seventy-five years of that span, during which he worked almost every day: the list of his publications includes five novels; two exemplary memoirs; a hundred or so short stories; travel books about Ireland, the United States, London, and, especially, Spain; studies on Chekhov, Turgenev, and Meredith; thousands of reviews and thousands of letters. In his prime he was loved and admired as much in New York as in his native London, and for years it was almost commonplace to describe him as the best of living English writers. Now, less than a decade after his death, VSP, as he was universally known, is almost, if not quite, forgotten. (The initials V. S. now belong to Naipaul.) This posthumous occultation is the more surprising in that there remain alive, on both sides of the ocean, many literary people who knew Pritchett well, and many others who, like myself, had a more distant but still cordial relationship with him and joined the chorus of praise.

It is to be hoped that Jeremy Treglown's biography will arrest this slide into premature oblivion. He has interviewed Pritchett's friends, and studied the loaded archives in the New York Public Library, the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center in Texas, and numerous British collections. It is not easy to see what more he could have done, short of writing one of those thousand-page biographies that are wanting in nothing except discrimination and skill. He recounts Pritchett's quiet-seeming but still extraordinary life with sympathetic care, and he deals sensitively with the writings, especially when discussing the stories, which used to be thought of, and surely will be again, as among the best in the language.

I had not expected to be surprised by Treglown's book, having accepted VSP as most did who were not intimates—a genial, marvelously well-read clubman, a writer who took his own independent bearings on past and present and was modern without being modernist: a model to younger reviewers and critics, though by general consent in a virtually unapproachable class of his own. What first surprised me was the way Treglown's account of the writer's youth supplemented and altered Pritchett's own accounts of it; and after that, the portrait of the older Pritchett as a passionate man, often anxious and for long periods deeply unhappy—a man cursed and blessed by his marriages, professionally and socially successful yet never financially secure. Even in his most celebrated years he could not live by his books alone, and remained dependent on journalism, which he continued throughout his life to produce in astonishing quantities.

Pritchett had from the outset aspired to be a professional writer, always claiming the right to be both an artist and a man who, like other professionals, was entitled to the rewards earned by people who do difficult jobs. He liked to say that his reason for studying the idiosyncrasies of other people was that he could turn them into cash. His extravagant and frequently bankrupt father was chief among his victims. Treglown suggests that Pritchett was rather hard on the amusing old fraud, who lavished money on himself but made Victor leave school at sixteen. But Victor was a genuine autodidact, already as a boy an insatiable reader and a good linguist; and although he sometimes expressed regret at having missed a formal education, he seems not to have had much need of it. And in one respect the father may have proved helpful, for his membership in the Christian Science movement steered Victor into his first journalistic job, with *The Christian Science Monitor*. That contact may also have kindled Victor's enduring interest in the strange forms sometimes taken by popular religious sentiment.

He published his first story, unsigned but initialed "VSP," at twenty-one, about the same time he began to work regularly for the *Monitor*. Abandoning his first job in the leather trade, he went to live and write in Paris. This, as Treglown remarks, was the time when Gertrude Stein, Hemingway, and Joyce dominated the modernist Parisian scene, but Pritchett knew nothing of them. Isolated in Paris, he continued his strenuous course of self-education. In 1923, his newspaper sent him to cover the civil war in Ireland, and later directed him to Spain, a country that was to become extremely important to him. Then, when they moved him to Boston, he walked in the Appalachians, meeting and writing about people he called "America's only peasantry." These encounters, says Treglown, were good preparation for his later writings about Spain.

BEFORE THIS FIRST AMERICAN visit, Pritchett married an Anglo-Irish woman. Although the marriage lasted many years, it was more or less permanently unhappy, owing to sexual incompatibility. Evelyn shared some formative years and some hard times with Pritchett, but later he had little to say of her, and she more or less disappears from the record. She was instrumental, by chance, in his meeting Dorothy Roberts, the woman who was to be his second wife, his secretary-manager, the dedicatee of almost all his books, and the mother of his children. The union with Dorothy began like a sexual thunderclap and long remained a great success in that department. By a rare disposition of providence, exactly the same thing happened to Evelyn when she married again. A Pritchett might plot a story on this happy coincidence and fill it out with startling details. Whether the correspondence of Evelyn and her partner matched the sexual candor of the Pritchetts' may be doubted, for the letters of VSP and Dorothy, as here reported, seem to rival those of James and Nora Joyce. Happy days! But miserable times followed when Dorothy became seriously alcoholic. Occasionally VSP chose to leave home, but with the support of Alcoholics Anonymous his wife recovered, and the remainder of their lives seems to have been quite abnormally contented.

Pritchett was not absolutely faithful, and he had a particularly serious affair with Barbara Kerr, whom he met in New York. It was in progress when Dorothy was in hospital drying out, and news of

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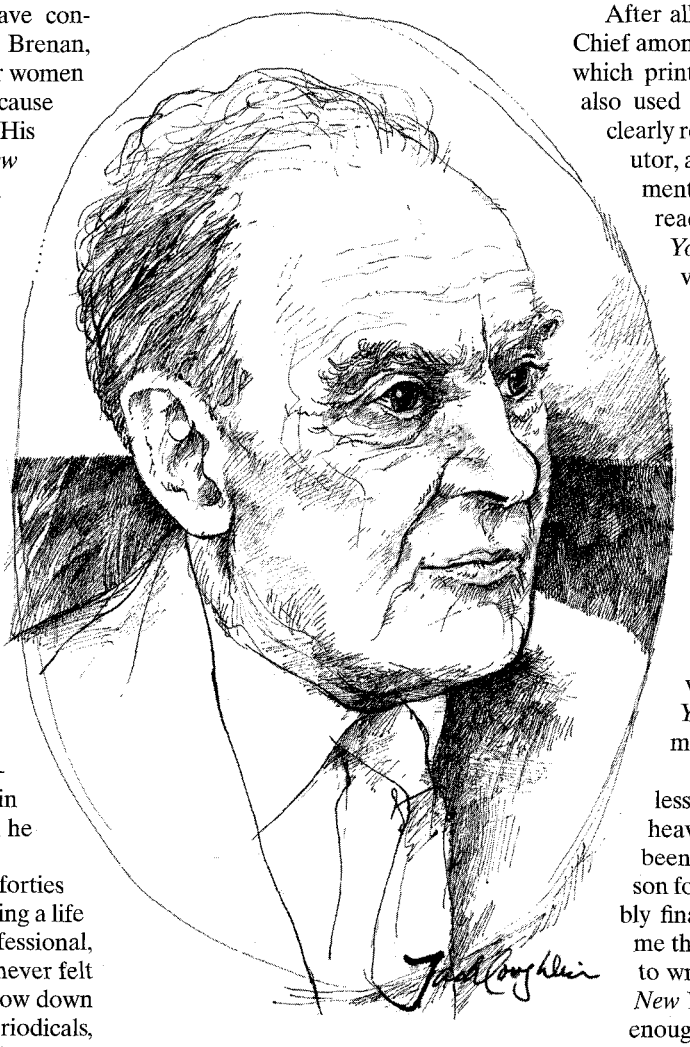
it caused her to relapse. The affair continued at intervals and made both participants happy, but eventually he ended it with an unforgivably frigid letter of dismissal, here reprinted—a reminder that somewhere beneath his genial appearance VSP had a chilly egotistical streak, as some who worked with him have testified.

It was possible, of course, to know the Pritchetts and know nothing of all these disturbances. VSP seems to have confided only in his friend Gerald Brenan, another writer with a passion for women and Spain. And Spain could also cause Pritchett emotional difficulties. His long association with *The New Statesman*, the left-wing weekly, did not persuade him to volunteer, as Orwell did, for service in Spain during the civil war. Treglown says that Pritchett knew the country and its politics too well to be as uncritical of the Republican cause as his colleagues; as he himself remarked, he distrusted "the easily raised emotions of the ill-informed." He might also have thought it irresponsible to get mixed up in the war when he had recently started a family. And perhaps, as Andrew Marvell said of the English civil war, he thought the cause too good to have been fought for. Treglown concludes that he loved the landscape and the literature of Spain better than its politics. Anyway, he stayed home.

In his own and the century's forties and fifties, VSP was at last enjoying a life appropriate to a successful professional, but he never stopped working, never felt he had enough in the bank to slow down a little. He wrote for many periodicals, but his base was at *The New Statesman* in its greatest days, now long over. The journal had a regular feature named "Book in General," a "middle" of some 1,500 words, not a review but an essay on some important writer, and Pritchett was by far the most frequent contributor. Samples of his work can be seen in his collections *The Living Novel* (1946) and *The Working Novelist* (1965). Almost everybody who has tried his or her hand at this kind of writing—brief, packed but elegant, ranging from Richardson to Dostoevsky and Wharton to Musil—acknowledges his extraordinary skill. Here, picked almost at random, are some lines from an essay on *Middlemarch*:

> In Dr. Casaubon George Eliot sees that tragedy may paralyse the very intellect which was to be Dorothea's emancipation. Much of herself (George Eliot said, when she was accused of portraying Mark Pattison) went into Casaubon, and I can think of no English novel before or since which has so truthfully, so sympathetically and so intimately described the befogged and grandiose humiliations of the scholar, as he turns at bay before the vengeance of life. Casaubon's jealously is unforgettable, because, poisonous though it is, it is not the screech of an elderly cuckold, but the voice of strangled nature calling for justice.



V. S. Pritchett by Jack Coughlin for The New Republic

Nowadays the tone of these essays—the bookman's civilized discourse—may seem a shade old-fashioned, as it did to a younger generation of journalists when they took over at the *Statesman* and wanted VSP to have a less central role. "Books in General" was occasionally entrusted to younger writers, including me. The master was not entirely pleased by this development, but he managed to be generous.

After all, he had many other outlets. Chief among them was *The New Yorker*, which printed many of his stories and also used him as a reviewer. He was clearly regarded as a valuable contributor, and he entered into an agreement to give the magazine the first reading of his stories. But *New Yorker* editors tended to be severe and they expected compliance from their authors. Pritchett submitted to various ethical and grammatical constraints, and dealt with the understandable criticism that his stories were so often concerned with un-American types and characters. "When My Girl Comes Home," a work of scrupulous imaginative development that he later chose to call his best story, was turned down by *The New Yorker*, and so were a good many others.

Pritchett seems to have been less troubled by rejections and heavy editing than might have been expected. A part of the reason for his acquiescence was probably financial. He once remarked to me that a story might take a month to write; if it was accepted by *The New Yorker* the payment would be enough to support life for at least a month, but if it was turned down in America he would be lucky to get £50 or so for it in London. He had reason to be grateful to America: in his most prosperous days a large proportion of his income came from there, and he spent more and more time at American universities and colleges such as Princeton and Smith. He came to love the country and even loved its editors. With Roger Angell, the *New Yorker* editor with whom he was most concerned, he formed a close friendship, sometimes agreeing to follow his advice not only in respect of local detail but even when Angell suggested

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major structural changes in important stories.

Treglown's account of this relationship is augmented by an interesting article by Jonathan Bloom in a recent issue of *The Sewanee Review*. Pritchett accepted that Angell's imaginative editorial interventions in a story called "On the Edge of the Cliff" were improvements, but when it appeared as the leading item in the collection of stories that Pritchett published in 1960, much (though not all) of the original text was restored. Pritchett did not always capitulate and must sometimes have felt that in the end he himself was the expert and should have the last word. But he and Angell worked together for more than forty years, Angell growing less intrusive and VSP more assured. "I think your criticisms miss the point," he wrote on one occasion. "I am therefore disinclined to revise and resubmit [a story called "The Camberwell Beauty"]. It will be the making of the completed volume as it stands." But twenty-three of the eighty-three stories in the *Complete Collected Stories* of 1990 appeared first in *The New Yorker*, so it would seem that, despite such moments of chill, both sides were happy with the arrangement. That so many of Pritchett's stories have English settings and a strong English flavor suggests an admirable degree of intelligence and experience in editors who, however haughty, still valued the aesthetic qualities of the work.

As for VSP, he learned his trade in the early years of the century, when the short story still flourished. He worked as a craftsman, always revising, adding rich detail to the main idea, yet seeing the stories as poems—sonnets, he once said—with strict formal obligations, compressed and complete. He was a master of the commonplace, but also of its transfiguration. This was sometimes comic in a Dickensian way: a thin man sitting down on a sofa folds up "like a small piece of human trellis." Sometimes the effect was more lyrical. The commonplace exists to be transfigured, as in the early, seminal story "The Saint," in which a missionary from The Church of the Purification falls into a river. He lies down in a buttercup meadow to dry out, and when he gets up his blue suit has been turned golden by buttercup pollen. An odd, tedious man is transfigured, becomes an image of the beauty that may be conferred by fiction, by poetry, on lives that may be commonplace, crooked, greedy, ignorantly religious.

Martin Amis, one of a later *New Statesman* crowd, spoke of Pritchett's fiction as having "a freakish certitude," which is itself an expression of freakish exactness. Pritchett's fiction is alive with accurately placed surprises, some of them tiny conceits that light up a sentence and startle the reader, some major plot reversals that alter a whole life. He did not confine fictional beauty to any social class, because he admired "the amount of moral energy, even heroism, that ordinary people put into making their love and marriages survive the attacks of contemporary life." And, as Amis also noticed, he wrote about women with "a curious inwardness."

Jeremy Treglown is a good critic as well as an industrious and sympathetic biographer. When he turns his attention to the fiction and the two volumes of autobiography he speaks of them with inwardness, as works of art, and places them accurately within the context of VSP's long, joyful, laborious, and at times tormented life. ■

Ruth Franklin

Mr. Memory

BREAKING GROUND: ADVENTURES IN LIFE AND ARCHITECTURE
By Daniel Libeskind
(Riverhead, 288 pp., $27.95)

I.

"THE MOST CONSPICUOUS thing about memorials is precisely that one does not notice them," Robert Musil famously wrote. We can walk along a street every day for months, getting to know each crack in the sidewalk, and yet be astonished one day to discover a plaque announcing that "from eighteen-hundred-something to eighteen-hundred-something-else the unforgettable Someone-or-other lived and worked here." Yet memorials, Musil continues, must not be allowed to fade into the background, because that would dishonor the very people they are intended to commemorate. He calls for them to be more "vigorous," lamenting that in comparison with the developments in other fields, the art of memorial-making is lagging behind. "Anyone can stand quietly on the street and allow people to steal glances at him; today we must demand more from a monument.... Why shouldn't the bronze-cast hero at least resort to the outdated gimmick of tapping his finger against a windowpane? Why don't the figures in a marble group turn towards each other, like the better-made figures in shop windows do, or at least open and close their eyes?" The very least one can ask, in this "age of noise and motion," is that memorials bear mottos such as "Goethe's *Faust* is the best!"

Musil recorded these observations in 1936, three years before the start of World War II, a cataclysm that precipitated dramatic new developments in the art of memorial-making. The genteel, quotidian examples that inspired Musil's irritation—the subtle plaque on the side of an apartment building, the equestrian statue honoring some captain or other—are no longer what spring immediately to mind when we think of memorials. Someone walking the streets of Vienna today is equally likely to come upon one of the city's more than forty monuments commemorating the Holocaust, which take the form of everything from a giant rendering of Orpheus visiting Hades to a stark mausoleum by Rachel Whiteread. Graphic testimonials to the most horrific events of the twentieth century now pockmark Europe: the illuminated pit lined with empty shelves on Bebelplatz in Berlin, where the Nazi book-burning took place; the enormous statue of six mourning human forms with a slice hacked out of them rising above a hill south of Kraków that was once the site of a labor camp; not to mention the remains of the death camps themselves, the most eloquent (if unintentional) memorials of all.

America has hardly been immune to the epidemic proliferation of memorials, but here the rash has appeared in a milder form. Like those of prewar Vienna, our memorials observe the protocols of a genteel society: rather than howling faces or gashed bodies, tasteful abstractions invite us to contemplate

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death and destruction. The Holocaust memorial in Baltimore is a concrete wall that sits considerately off the beaten tourist track on a corner in the city's run-down downtown. Denver's monument to the massacre at Babi Yar consists of two enormous chunks of polished granite. In Boston, six illuminated glass towers are delicately inscribed with the names of extermination camps.

The memorial that both epitomizes and surpasses the American style of tasteful abstraction is, of course, Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial, which in its starkness and its specificity reaches an emotive depth that its imitators cannot fathom. Lin's memorial, which is among the most visited sites on the National Mall, consists of a series of black granite panels arranged to form a V-shaped wall that appears slowly to rise from the earth before sinking into it again. The panels are inscribed with the names of the 58,245 soldiers who died in the war or who are still missing. A part of the reason for the success of this memorial is that it addresses what is implicitly lacking in American monuments. The memorials of Europe are often located directly on the sites of the events that they commemorate. But American soil was remarkably unsullied by the depredations of the twentieth century; and so it is no wonder that our public art looks upon these crimes with a greater level of abstraction—a remove that Lin's memorial, in its subtle and yet penetrating way, manages to overcome.

With the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, all that changed. In less than two hours, sixteen acres of Lower Manhattan became the city's, and the country's, newest graveyard. The former site of the World Trade Center will forever bear the marks of the greatest number of American deaths to occur on native soil since Antietam. The memorial that will eventually be built on the site—and, starting just days after September 11, it was the nearly universal assumption that *something* would have to be built there—will be a place of pilgrimage for generations to come.

As befits our memory-obsessed society, the dust from the towers of the World Trade Center had hardly settled before speculation had begun regarding what would take their place. But with the selection of Daniel Libeskind as the designer of the site's "master plan," New York lost whatever chance it had to honor its dead properly. In one way, Libeskind was an obvious choice: his designs to date, which consist mainly of a handful of museums in Europe and America, are nearly necrophiliac in their reverence for death. No matter what the subject, he steeps his buildings in morbidity and commemoration. But his work combines its memorial tendencies with a vulgar didacticism that goes beyond even the lurid sloganeering that Musil imagined. For all the visual power of Libeskind's architecture, it finally shows very little respect for the dead whom it so ostentatiously remembers.

II.

THE COVER OF LIBESKIND'S slick new memoir depicts the architect as a young boy posing with a spade. The trendy half-size dust jacket, which wraps around the binding below the photograph, renders the skyline of Lower Manhattan as Libeskind's master plan for rebuilding Ground Zero envisions it, dominated by his 1,776-foot-high Freedom Tower and four shorter skyscrapers spiraling up to meet it, the curve outlined by their roofs intended to reflect the shape of the Statue of Liberty's torch. As the juxtaposition of these images suggests, Libeskind's self-promotional, megalomaniacal, and pathologically narcissistic book posits as its central theme the idea that the project of rebuilding Ground Zero, like the commission for the Jewish Museum in Berlin, was his destiny, foreordained by his childhood experiences, by the course of his career, and perhaps also by a higher power. But the cover image has another implication that Libeskind probably did not intend: the boy with the spade appears to be actually digging up the skyline, destroying his own creation.

Libeskind takes pride in calling himself "more cornball than cosmopolite," but since childhood he has been something of a globetrotter. Born in Lodz in 1946 to Polish Jews who spent the war years in the Soviet Union, he was a child prodigy on the accordion, winning a scholarship that led the family to immigrate to Israel when he was eleven. They came to New York two years later, and in his public statements about the World Trade Center project Libeskind has often recalled his first vision of the city with the Statue of Liberty rising before it, an image "so iconic that at times it feels as if I assumed it from an old RKO newsreel." The Libeskind family's tale of immigration is nearly as iconic: his father worked as a photo-offset stripper, and his mother, who in Poland and Israel had operated a corset-making shop, found a job in a sweatshop dyeing fur (which contributed to her eventual death from cancer). The family lived in an Amalgamated Clothing Workers' Union housing cooperative in the Bronx. Daniel attended Bronx High School of Science, where he first studied drawing seriously. He met Nina, his future wife, when they were both counselors at a Yiddish summer camp, and they married soon afterward.

LIBESKIND'S MEMOIR IS SILENT on the first phase of his career, which he spent, in the words of one critic, as a "peripatetic teacher with a portfolio full of elaborate, impossible sketches." The story of his professional life, as he tells it, begins in 1988, when he was living in Milan and "running a happily iconoclastic alternative architecture program out of our home." One day he received a letter inviting him to enter the competition to design what was then called the "Jewish Department of the Berlin Museum," which he greeted with his trademark fervor. "Within seconds I knew: This was a message sent directly to me." Alas, not so directly: the letter had been delayed in the post and the deadline had already passed, but Libeskind managed to beg his way into the competition.

At this point the architect had yet to have a building completed. "I was an architectural theorist and an academic ... I had been more interested in ideas and abstract concepts than in the utilitarian aspects of the field," he says. This background served him well in his design for what would become the Jewish Museum, for with this project he created the signature synthesis of highly conceptual gimmickry and morbid historical obsession that would become his brand, and the key to his popular appeal. He started by subverting the rules, rejecting the very idea of a "Jewish department": "I would offer a design that would architecturally integrate Jewish history into Berlin's rich, multitextured history and enable people, even encourage them, to feel what had happened." (Libeskind points out, correctly, that the phrase "Jewish department" was anachronistic and spectacularly insensitive, as it was the "Jewish department" of the Gestapo that was charged with carrying out the Final Solution.) He looked up the addresses of ordinary Jews

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in the city's *Gedenkbuch*, or memorial book, and plotted them on a map along with the addresses of famous intellectuals. The result, he found, formed the pattern of "a distorted Star of David over the map of Berlin," and this shape inspired the building's form. The report that accompanied Libeskind's model, called "Between the Lines," was written on musical notation paper and mimicked the structure of the *Gedenkbuch*; and he decorated the exterior of his model with a collage of names from the book. Unable to resist a single opportunity for a symbolic gesture, he chose 6,000,001 as his identifying number for the competition.

Libeskind could not have made his intentions any clearer: his building is not a Jewish museum, it is a Holocaust memorial. Its most radical feature is a series of "voids" that cut through the building and are visible but inaccessible: one of them is paved with countless tiny screaming metal faces, an installation art project. The "Staircase of Continuity" dead-ends into a blank white wall. The "Holocaust Tower," ninety feet tall, is neither heated nor cooled, and lit only by a narrow slit in the roof. In the "Garden of Exile and Emigration," plants are placed out of reach in forty-nine tall pillars (forty-eight to represent 1948, the year Israel was created, plus an extra for Berlin); the garden's foundation is "oddly tilted, making visitors feel disoriented, even seasick." And the museum has no front door: you enter through the Baroque building that housed the former City Museum, then descend to three passageways (Libeskind calls them "axes") below street level. Lest the symbolism of these elements not be obvious enough on its own, the building is strewn with placards announcing, "The architect Daniel Libeskind intends ..." or "The architect Daniel Libeskind believes...."

In some ways Libeskind's style is nothing new: he sits firmly in the tradition of *architecture parlante*, or "speaking architecture," buildings whose structure literally enacts a function or a program, as in the eighteenth-century architect Ledoux's whimsical designs for the town of Chaux, in which the hoop-makers were to be housed in structures shaped like wheels and the brothel was shaped like a giant phallus. But rather than a speaking architecture, Libeskind's is a feeling architecture. "I don't concentrate solely on what a building will look like, I focus also on what it will feel like," he explains:

> Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius, and the other great modernist masters argued that buildings should present a neutral face to the world, but theirs is a philosophy that feels almost quaint now. Neutral? After the political, cultural, and spiritual devastations of the twentieth century, is it possible to embrace an antiseptic reality? Do we really want to be surrounded by buildings that are soulless and dull? Or do we confront our histories, our complicated and messy realities, our unadulterated emotions, and create an architecture for the twenty-first century?

One need not share Libeskind's hostility to modernism (at one point he writes that "a cool box building has no place in this world") to agree that the Jewish Museum probably would not have been well served by a Bauhaus design. His belief that buildings should be inspired by a sense of place and an understanding of history, that they can have a spiritual resonance that reflects the "constellation of realities and invisible forces" that shape our lives, is ambitious and sincere, if largely uncontroversial.

But demagogic emotionalism is not the only alternative to diffident formalism. And there is something disturbing about the programmatic didacticism of Libeskind's "emotional architecture." He does not wish only to provoke feelings; he wants also to dictate them, to control them. He leaves nothing to chance: every corner, every angle is exploited for the greatest symbolic value that can be derived from it. This is not limited to the Jewish Museum, the clunkily allegorical elements of which have an almost parodic, Bunyanesque quality. For the Felix Nussbaum Haus in the northwestern German town of Osnabrück, which honors the German painter who died in Auschwitz, he designed a six-foot-wide passageway to depict "the compression of experience." Typically, the building puts its visitors through an elaborate dance of re-enactment. "Once you are inside, it's easy to lose your orientation; you follow labyrinthine corridors, and you come to dead ends," Libeskind writes. "Often you are forced to retrace your steps. Lest it sound like work, I should add that people tend to find the experience uplifting and memorable." But do they remember anything of the art hung in that six-foot corridor? With all Libeskind's insistence on emotion and experience, his buildings actually discourage reflection. They seek only to overwhelm.

THE JEWISH MUSEUM OPENED to the public in September 1999. It stood empty for two years, but still it was (and remains) one of Berlin's most popular cultural attractions. "Berliners understood the building, deep in their hearts," Libeskind writes. "They stood in the Holocaust Tower, silently, many with tears in their eyes. They studied the staircase, and knew why it dead-ended at a blank white wall." Some argued that the museum should remain empty, allowed to stand on its own as a memorial to the Holocaust. "Libeskind has to a great extent usurped the original purpose of the building, producing a memorial scheme that overwhelms all other references and purposes," Martin Filler wrote in these pages, expressing admiration for the museum's emotional force but skepticism about "how well this extraordinary architecture serves the complex purposes of this institution."

Of course, serving the institution's purposes was the furthest thing from Libeskind's mind. His design actually forced the museum to change its purposes, evolving from a "Jewish department" of a municipal museum to become "Jewish Museum Berlin: Two Millennia of German Jewish History," a vibrant cultural institution of its own. On the face of it, there is nothing wrong with this: Libeskind used his creative force ingeniously to effect progress in the creakiest of city bureaucracies. At the same time, though, there is something grotesque about turning a Jewish museum into a Holocaust memorial. The implicit argument of Libeskind's building is that the history of the Jews in Germany is best understood from the standpoint of the Holocaust: a doomed progress to a catastrophic end. The Holocaust-related elements of the building are heavy-handed and overdetermined, but they are also viscerally powerful—so much so that they make the rest of the long and rich story of German Jewry appear mere prelude, a long parenthesis.

And that is precisely the problem with Libeskind's work: his show-offy style, which preeningly calls attention to itself, demanding that the viewer see only the architecture and nothing more, actually obscures the lives that it intends to commemorate. In a museum honoring a neglected artist, Libeskind designed a

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gallery that forces the art to be hung in a manner that makes it impossible to see. And with the Jewish Museum, meant to celebrate the saga of Jewish life in Germany, Libeskind made it impossible to reflect on anything other than the Holocaust. The building's fatalistic argument—its sensation of Jewish doom, of the inevitability of Auschwitz—is macabre and insulting and untrue. And for all its "voids" and "axes," its intentional discomfort and its induced claustrophobia, one has very little sense from Libeskind's building that the Holocaust was not a crime against nature, but an event that brought terrible suffering to millions upon millions of people.

III.

THERE IS HARDLY A PAGE OF Libeskind's book on which he does not mention September 11. He may have felt the Jewish Museum commission to have been his destiny, but he views his role in the rebuilding of Ground Zero with an unparalleled messianic fervor. By the first anniversary of the terrorist attacks, however, there was still nothing approaching a consensus about how, or even whether, the site of the World Trade Center should be rebuilt. A power struggle had developed between Larry Silverstein, the developer who had signed a ninety-nine-year lease on the Twin Towers just weeks before the attacks and now demanded that any plan for the site must replace the ten million square feet of commercial space to which he was entitled, and the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, the agency created by George Pataki to oversee the planning process, which favored more flexibility in the planning. In July 2002, the LMDC unveiled a preliminary group of six designs for the site. These plans—each of which included a transit center, a series of bland-looking office towers, and a perfunctory memorial—were uniformly denounced by the media and the public. They revealed "a breathtaking determination to think small," wrote Herbert Muschamp, *The New York Times*' architecture critic. "Don't come looking for ideas that reflect the historic magnitude of last year's catastrophe.... What you see, instead, are proposals for real estate development."

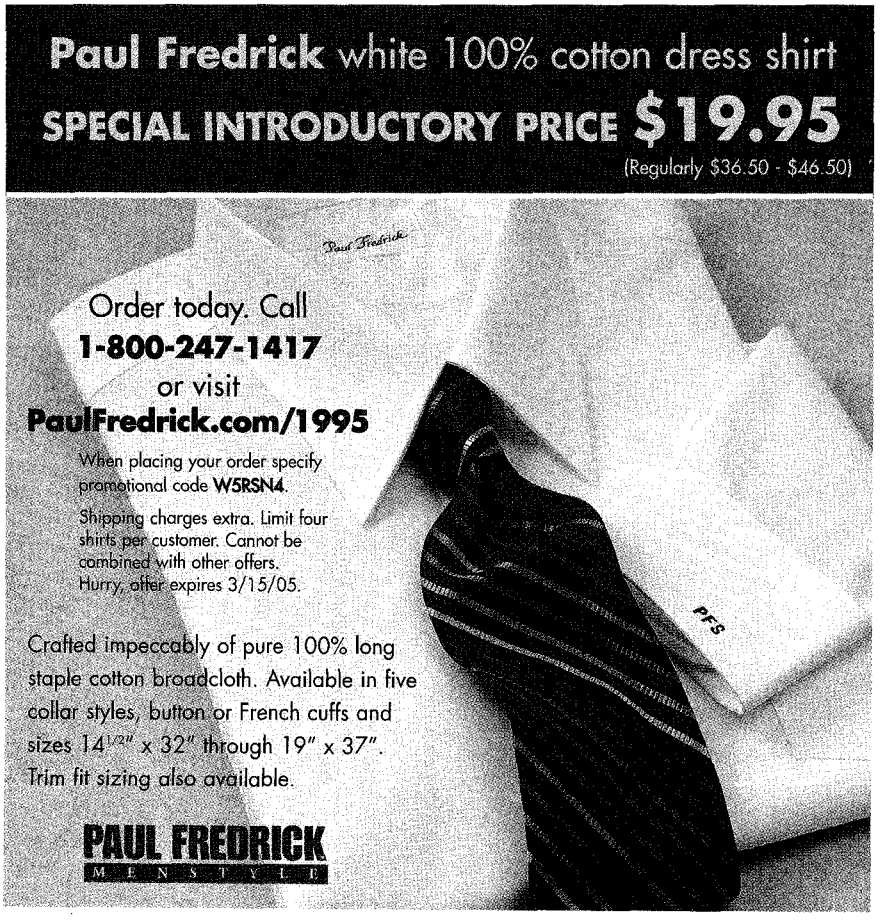
Two months later, Muschamp invited Libeskind to join a panel he was convening at the Venice Biennale to discuss the future of Ground Zero. He had already picked a group of architects, including such usual suspects as Richard Meier, Rafael Viñoly, Zaha Hadid, and Rem Koolhaas, to create designs for Ground Zero to be featured in a special issue of *The New York Times Magazine*. Looking at the architects' creations previewed at the panel, Libeskind recalls, he was overcome with the "sickening thought" that

> something was wrong with what we were looking at. Really, very wrong.
>
> So much was being said about what had happened at Ground Zero, but so little was being conveyed by the architecture itself. Almost three thousand people had died, and we were treating the site of the tragedy as a tabula rasa, a clean slate to be filled with fashionable buildings.... The designs were so *current*, so *smart*, and everyone was feeling so very, very clever....

Invited to the podium to speak, Libeskind stood silently before the room with his head in his hands for several minutes. Finally, he said that what the site needed was "a more profound indication of memory.... Glossy, contemporary, ironic, self-satisfied architecture isn't the answer."

As fate would have it, Libeskind had been invited to serve on the jury for the World Trade Center competition, but a prior commitment made it impossible for him to attend the meeting. And so he entered the competition instead. The challenge, as the LMDC had set it, was to come up with a master plan "that would address both the philosophical and the emotional questions raised at the site ... while tackling critical practical problems raised by the destruction of the towers": the re-creation of a transportation hub, the re-integration of the site into the rest of the city, and, not least, the replacement of the already infamous ten million square feet of retail and office space.

One would have expected Libeskind to subvert these criteria, as he had in his Jewish Museum design; and if anyone had a chance of convincing the New York bureaucracy that office space should not set the terms for the rebuilding of Ground Zero, it might have been him. Instead, he seems to have decided that it was wiser politically to leap to the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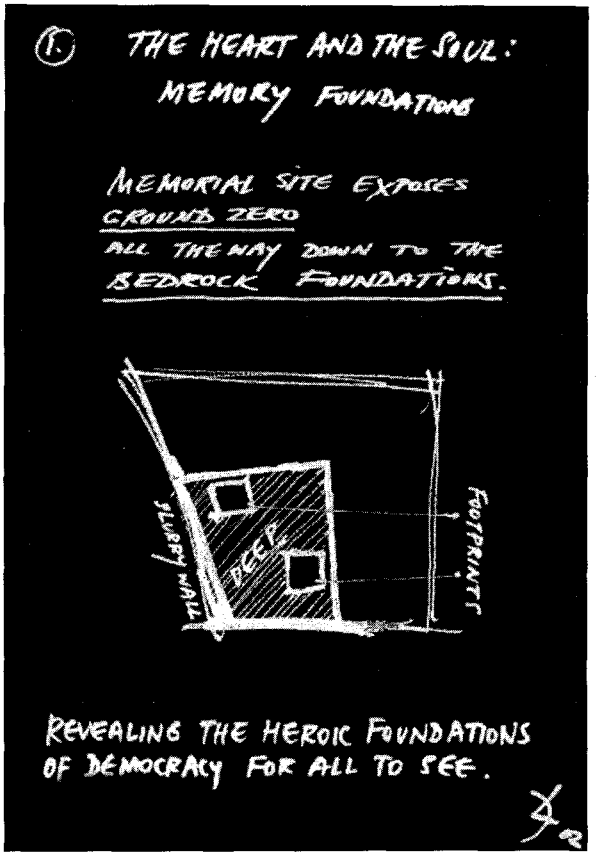
challenge. He re-read the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Visiting the site, he was powerfully impressed by the slurry wall, part of the buildings' foundations, which still stood in the pit: a giant dam made of concrete that safeguarded the Twin Towers from the waters of the Hudson. "It was haptic, tactile, pulsing, a multi-layered text written in every conceivable language," he writes. The wall, he felt, contained yet another message for him: "In refusing to fall, it seemed to attest, perhaps as eloquently as the Constitution, to the unshakable foundations of democracy and the value of human life and liberty."

And so Libeskind's plan, which he grandiosely titled "The Heart and the Soul: Memory Foundations," included the requisite skyscraper, but it also looked "down, into the pit, because I felt that was where the memory of the site also resided." As with the Jewish Museum, he left no opportunity for commemoration unexploited. The plan, rendered in slashing white lines on black paper, began by envisioning a memorial site that would preserve the original "footprints" of the Twin Towers, leaving their foundations exposed, with a walkway along the slurry wall—"revealing the heroic foundations of democracy for all to see." The next drawing, titled "September 11 Matrix," depicted the memorial site with what Libeskind called "Heroes Lines to Ground Zero," which would incorporate the routes taken by firefighters, police, and other rescue workers into pathways leading outward from "September 11 Plaza," to be located at the intersection of Fulton and Greenwich streets. A bigger plaza, called either "Wedge of Light" or "Park of Heroes," was situated so that it would be bathed in sunlight every September 11 from 8:48 a.m. (the moment the first plane hit Tower One) until 10:28 a.m. (when the second tower fell). Finally, the skyline, which the plan referred to as "Life Victorious," would include a group of five towers, set in a spiral shape and each gradually increasing in height, up to the focal point, an asymmetrical "Freedom Tower" of which the spire, rising to 1,776 feet, would visually echo the Statue of Liberty's torch, visible directly across the harbor.

Again, what distinguished Libeskind from his competitors was his design's powerful memorial focus: it turned every aspect of the site into an opportunity for commemoration, every detail of the disaster into an object of architectural allegory and illustration. And in so doing, his book takes great pains to emphasize, it spoke to New Yorkers' hearts. After the seven shortlisted plans were presented to the public at the Winter Garden in December 2002, Libeskind writes, he was swarmed by the victims' family members, many of whom, he says, later would become his personal friends. Doormen would call out to him as he walked down the street; even the customs inspector who stamped his passport at Kennedy Airport offered his support. (Libeskind's book is full of insufferable anecdotes testifying to his proletarian appeal, from a glass-cutter who says his work on the Jewish Museum "reached the limits of my profession" to the security guards who never fail to greet Libeskind with encouraging words.) "You could tell by the sustained applause and tears that this is what people really wanted, and what New York needs," Ada Louise Huxtable wrote in *The Wall Street Journal*. "Forget the additional time and expense of a competition, nothing will ever be better than this."


1.
THE HEART AND THE SOUL:
MEMORY FOUNDATIONS
MEMORIAL SITE EXPOSES GROUND ZERO ALL THE WAY DOWN TO THE BEDROCK FOUNDATIONS.
SLURRY WALL
PIER
FOOTPRINTS
REVEALING THE HEROIC FOUNDATIONS OF DEMOCRACY FOR ALL TO SEE.

Daniel Libeskind's proposal for the memorial at Ground Zero

In fact, the competition did continue for several more months, finally coming down to Libeskind and a group called THINK headed by Rafael Viñoly, whose design included a pair of open-scaffolding towers that would house cultural spaces. Libeskind's plan was not unanimously favored. Muschamp called it "predictably kitsch" and "startlingly aggressive … a war memorial to a looming conflict that has scarcely begun." A television news poll showed that 13 percent of New Yorkers preferred Libeskind's plan, 15 percent preferred the THINK team's, and 70 percent did not like either one. The LMDC eventually chose THINK, but Pataki himself overruled them to name Libeskind the designer. (Libeskind presents Pataki's support of his plan as partially due to the influence of the lawyer Eddie Hayes, a friend of Pataki's who intervened on his behalf, and emphasized to the governor his and Libeskind's common culture as immigrants from Eastern Europe. One suspects that this might not be the full story, and in his new book *Sixteen Acres: Architecture and the Outrageous Struggle for the Future of Ground Zero*, Philip Nobel makes a good case that campaign contributions to Pataki from Ronald Lauder may have had something to do with Libeskind's selection.)

In any event, it quickly became clear that Libeskind's master plan would be understood as only a loose guideline. David Childs of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill was named lead designer of the "Freedom Tower," and the final design—the result of months of wrangling between the two architects—bears little resemblance to Libeskind's original. The only battle that Libeskind won was his literalist insistence that the tower remain 1,776 feet tall, although Childs, understandably, found the symbolism architecturally irrelevant and jingoistic. The alterations made to the skyscraper wiped out the "Park of Heroes." And it turned out that the "Wedge of Light," as Libes-

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kind had planned it, would be partially shadowed by the planned construction of a hotel, a revelation that, embarrassingly for Libeskind, was reported on the front page of *The New York Times*' Metro section. The design for the memorial itself, which was chosen in a separate competition, fills in part of the pit Libeskind had left open and forces the removal of a cultural building that Libeskind had wanted to cantilever over the site. Libeskind either downplays or ignores these setbacks in his book, which reproduces his original design for the skyscraper and other buildings as if no modifications had been made. Philip Nobel renders a more sober verdict. "Daniel Libeskind, in the end, left almost no mark; his political capital was spent," he writes. "From the moment he wowed the Winter Garden with his first presentation, [he] lasted a year and a day in the process."

IV.

For all Libeskind's pomp and circumstance, there is no denying the fact that his plan for Ground Zero does seem to have spoken to many New Yorkers on a visceral, even profound level. Its most striking elements—the excavation of the foundation pit to reveal the slurry wall and the safeguarding of the towers' "footprints"—reflect a respect for the gravity of what happened at Ground Zero that simply putting up a new skyscraper would not. No matter what the ultimate verdict is on whatever buildings do get built, Libeskind cannot be accused of being a proponent of "clever" architecture.

In fact, one of the problems with Libeskind's architecture is that it is not clever enough. It does not take architecture seriously—as a medium, as an art in itself rather than a vessel for allegory. Libeskind pays lip service to the idea of respecting his sites, but in fact he never offers an architectural reason why his skyscraper should be 1,776 feet tall. (He argues that the 2,000-foot tower that Childs proposed would dwarf the rest of the skyline, but it's hard to think that his own—more than 400 feet taller than the Twin Towers—would not have the same effect.) The symbolism derives from the peculiar narrative that Libeskind has imposed on the site, just as the "voids" scattered through the Jewish Museum have no purpose architecturally other than to dramatize his vision of the Holocaust. With so little interest in the artistic integrity of his creations, Libeskind cannot be called an architect so much as a mnemonic engineer.

And yet at the same time Libeskind's architecture is doomed by its relentless inward focus, its inability to look beyond the physicality of his structures to achieve some appreciation of their historical and cultural context. This is most breathtaking in his discussion of September 11, which he seems to consider as great a tragedy for the World Trade Center itself as for its inhabitants. He knows the anatomy of the Twin Towers as if it were his own, but he mentions the thousands of lives lost on September 11 in only the most perfunctory way. "Buildings have hearts and souls, just as cities do," he writes. "We can feel the memory and meaning in a building, sense the spiritual and cultural longing it evokes. If you doubt that, think about the heartbreaking immensity of the loss when the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center collapsed." At one point he even interprets the movie *The Shining* as a prefiguration of September 11: "The repeated, deadly visions of the pretty twin girls have struck me as visions of the Twin Towers themselves."

But buildings did not die on September 11, people did. It seems there could be nothing more banal than such a statement, and yet it must be said, because the designer of the Ground Zero site seems to imagine it as a memorial to dead buildings. This is no accident; it reflects a belief that is intrinsic to Libeskind's understanding of architecture. The first page of his book contains the extraordinary statement that "When we consider history, what we see before us are the buildings": Versailles as an emblem of the French Revolution, the Colosseum to represent Rome. But this is not, to put it mildly, a universal truth. Most of us envision first the actors who created that history, even if we do not actually go so far as to picture Louis XIV or Julius Caesar. What we remember first are their ideas, their actions—not their physical creations.

Libeskind was right to rebel against the idea of treating the site as a "tabula rasa to be filled with fashionable buildings." Memorials—and he is right, too, that the function of Ground Zero is most importantly as a memorial—serve a crucial function in shaping the collective memory of a nation. By providing a public space for people to gather with the common purpose of remembering a tragedy, they encourage the creation of a common narrative of the past. But with their aggressive imposition of their own emotional narrative, Libeskind's designs thwart the natural process by which a people interprets and embraces a memorial. For all his encomia to the American spirit, he fails to recognize that we cannot be told how to think about September 11, either as individuals or as a nation. Perhaps someday the pit at Ground Zero will seem an appropriate emblem of the foundations of democracy, and the Freedom Tower a natural outgrowth of the terrible violence that occurred at the World Trade Center; but not yet.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial, with its simple angled lines and seemingly interminable list of names, is deliberately and explicitly without an agenda. By allowing each visitor to have his or her own personal experience there, it actually enabled a nation divided by the war to find a single point of common mourning. So, too, with the *Gedenkbuch* that was once Libeskind's inspiration: it forces no structure beyond the alphabet, embodying at once the specificity of personal suffering and the abstraction that remains when narrative is removed. (September 11 had its own *Gedenkbuch*, the "Portraits of Grief" published by *The New York Times*, which offer the briefest capsules of the lives of those who perished.) And so, too, or at least one can hope, with the memorial design that has been chosen for Ground Zero, which politely ignores Libeskind's overdetermination and imposes its own exquisitely subtle form: two reflecting pools that will lie in the footprints of the towers, with a park above. In the end, the best and most lasting memorial may be one that is immaterial, even unnoticeable. ■

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Left Out

I WASN'T SUPPOSED TO BE HERE. I was supposed to be at a ball, a genuine inaugural ball with tuxedos and presidential seal–emblazoned square napkins and succulent miniature crab cakes. Regrettably, we're a liberal magazine and, consequently, many of us are less than perfectly organized (although, at THE NEW REPUBLIC, some of us prefer to think of ourselves as neo-disorganized)—and, well, I failed to honor certain press-credentialing deadlines. Instead, I was forced to cover "counter-inaugural events," and, as a result, last Thursday night I found myself sitting in a low-budget church on G Street in downtown Washington listening to speakers at an International Socialist Organization (ISO)–sponsored gathering called "Town Hall: Empire and Resistance."

NEEDLESS TO SAY, THIS WASN'T MUCH fun. I could have thrown a stone as far as my strength allowed and still have been certain of not hitting a crab cake. On the other hand, everyone else seemed to be having a good time. The 100 or so people there frequently applauded and hollered, and, as expected, phrases like "exposing Bush for what he is—a cold-blooded killer" were particular hits. I didn't even think there was much to report on. After all, who cares what the ideological fringe of the losing side has to say? But the more I heard, the more I became convinced that I had discovered something truly threatening: This band of socialists was the most effective recruiting tool for the Republican Party I'd ever encountered.

TO BEGIN WITH, THERE WERE THE posters on the wall: MONEY FOR JOBS AND EDUCATION, NOT FOR WAR AND OCCUPATION. Let's leave aside that the meter is somehow dissatisfying (nine syllables followed by eight). The main point is, if the shallowness of this statement bothers you, to what party do you look for comfort? To the Democrats, many of whom condemn building firehouses in Baghdad and closing firehouses at home? Or, do you say to yourself in that moment, "I don't much care for Newt Gingrich—nor does anyone else, for that matter—but I bet he hates that goddamn poster as much as I do"? I know where I was leaning.

THEN THERE WAS THE POOH-POOHING of elections—any elections. Former soldier Stan Goff (supposedly of the Delta Force, Rangers, and Special Forces) spoke at length about the evils of capitalism and declared, "We ain't never resolved *nothing* through an election." This drew loud, sustained applause. Nothing to get worked up about, I thought; just a bit of leftist trash talk. But today it seemed particularly bad. It wasn't just that I was missing what might be lovely canapés (or perhaps spring rolls brought about on trays with delectable dipping sauce); rather, it was the thought that the speaker was dismissing something that Afghans had recently risked their lives to participate in, something Iraq's insurgents view as so transformative that they are murdering scores of Iraqis to prevent it. No, what I needed to counter this speaker was not a Democrat like me who might argue that elections were, in fact, important. What I needed was a Republican like Arnold, who would walk up to him and punch him in the face.

BUT THE WORST CAME WITH THE FINAL speaker, a woman by the name of Sherry Wolf, a member of the editorial board of *International Socialist Review*. She talked, and talked, and talked; terms like "architects of the slaughter," "war criminal," and "Noam Chomsky" wafted about the room; my eyes grew so bleary that I ceased taking notes. But then she brought up the insurgents in Iraq. Sure they were bad, she admitted: "No one cheers the beheading of journalists." But, she continued, they had a "right" to rebel against occupation. Then she read from a speech by the activist Arundhati Roy: "Of course, [the Iraqi resistance] is riddled with opportunism, local rivalry, demagoguery, and criminality. But, if we were to only support pristine movements, then no resistance will be worthy of our purity." In sum, Wolf said, the choice boiled down to supporting occupation or resistance, and we had to support resistance. So there it was. I even forgot about the Constitution Ball for a minute. Apparently, we were to view the people who set off bombs killing over 150 peaceful Shia worshippers in Baghdad and Karbala as "resistance" fighters. And the audience seemed entirely fine with this. These weren't harmless lefties. I didn't want Nancy Pelosi talking sense to them; I wanted John Ashcroft to come busting through the wall with a submachine gun to round everyone up for an immediate trip to Gitmo, with Charles Graner on hand for interrogation.

I LEFT EARLY (I COULDN'T STOMACH the question-and-answer session) and made my way to the Metro. In the station were people wearing fur coats and tuxedos and lovely gowns and shiny shoes. I assumed they were in town to celebrate Bush's reelection, and, for a moment, I wanted to join in. After my session with the ISO, they suddenly looked. well, so appealing. Maybe I was feeling like *New York Times* columnist David Brooks after Osama bin Laden released another tape last October. Brooks wondered whether John Kerry felt the evil of bin Laden "deep in his gut—not just in his brain or in his policy statements, but ... so deep in his soul that it consumes him." It was a fair question.

DURING THE COLD WAR, PART OF WHAT made communism so dangerous was that many of its stated ideals overlapped with those of modern liberalism—anticolonialism, equal rights for women and minorities, economic justice. Today's Islamic militants, by contrast, stand for no values that a lefty could love. It takes a Sherry Wolf to believe that the shooting of Iraqi election workers is an outgrowth of the shared value of anti-imperialism. But, today, you get the sense that Democrats—who happily attend Michael Moore premieres—simply disagree with her; they don't hate what she stands for. Having attended college in New York City, I know what it's like to be confronted with some of the more irritating forms of campus leftism. Yet I never quite understood why, ultimately, such leftism should drive sensible people away from liberalism. An hour on G Street made it a little more understandable. Sure, the Democrats might be eager to smoke Osama out of his cave. But, sometimes, you just want to be on the side of whoever is more likely to take a bunker-buster to Arundhati Roy.

T. A. FRANK

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Tsunami Lessons

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As the toll from the tsunami continues to mount, it has become clear that this catastrophe was also a political turning point. No governments may have fallen, but some deeply held political myths and beliefs have not been able to withstand the force of the tidal wave that changed the world.

First and foremost, **the myth of Islamic solidarity has been shattered.** Despite most victims in Indonesia, the most populous Islamic country on the face of the earth, being Muslim, the support flowing from Arab governments has been pitifully small. The decades of petrodollars and the years of high gas prices have apparently not put the oil-rich Middle East in a position to afford to offer much help to Muslims in distress. But as Islamic victims receive support from the non-Islamic world, the already dubious claim that the general opinion of Muslims in the Middle East might be predisposed to rise up against the West becomes simply untenable.

In the face of a real disaster, neither the fundamentalists nor the Baathists nor the anticolonialists have done much at all. In contrast, the energy of the Western relief effort is likely to put a deep dent in the anti-Western and especially anti-American propaganda of the Islamicists.

Second, the generosity of the developed world has been considerable, especially from such regional neighbors as Japan and Australia but also from the United States and Europe. The tendentious suggestion that the United States was "stingy" failed to note that the "old European" powers initially proposed relatively low offers of aid as well. Only as the real extent of the disaster became clear did these amounts grow to many times their original size. Moreover, the outpouring of support has highlighted the importance of private giving and therefore the role of society beyond the state, just as it has shed light on the marginal standing of the United Nations.

The UN may still be able to find a raison d'etre in aid coordination. Although, after the debacle of the Oil-for-Food program, to expect a small dose of efficiency from a UN operation requires a bold leap of faith. **The UN was simply unable to provide the leadership that came from the representatives of democratic nations—better unilateral action than multilateral inaction.**

Finally, because disaster relief is not only about cash but also about a logistic capacity to deliver aid to the needy, a strategic military presence is crucial. Good intentions are a wonderful thing to have, but troops on the ground get things done. Although the Europeans have promised generous amounts of aid, they simply lack the naval capacity to transport it to the region in a timely manner, and it is unlikely that they will develop such a capacity in the future. The United States played a central role in the relief effort, thanks to its fleet. It is difficult to imagine that this operation will not counteract some residual anti-Americanism in the area. French president Jacques Chirac complained that the United States stole the limelight from a hypothetical multilateral effort he might have preferred, but in the meantime American aid has been able to save lives in Indonesia because U.S. forces were actually able to get there.

—Russell A. Berman

Russell A. Berman is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and the Walter A. Haas Professor in the Humanities at Stanford University. He is the author of Anti-Americanism in Europe: A Cultural Problem *(2004).*

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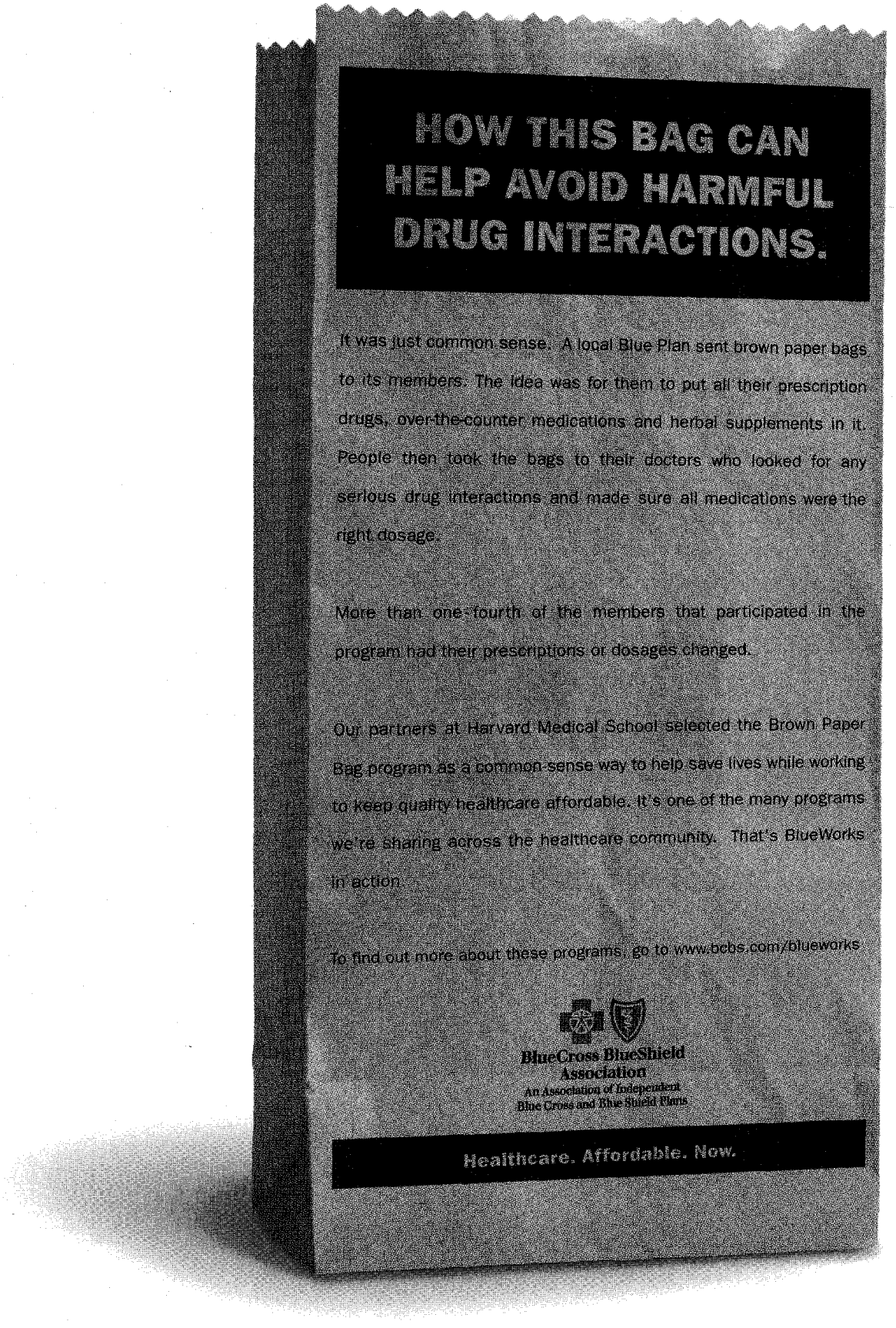
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